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LOVING AND SERVING.

BY

"HOLME LEE," *pen*

AUTHOR OF "SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "STRAIGHTFORWARD,"

"A POOR SQUIRE," ETC. ETC.

Harriet Parr.

"A quicke and soft touch of many strings, all shutting up in one
musical close."

SIR THOMAS OVERBURY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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OF
THE THIRD VOLUME.

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LOVING AND SERVING.



CHAPTER I.

“GO TO SPAIN.”

“He says he loves my daughter ; I think so too ;
I think there is not half a kiss to choose
Who loves another best.”—SHAKSPEARE.

THE next morning Dekker brought in a request to Mr. Brooke in the study : “ Mr. George Marriott wishes to see you, sir, if you please ? ” Mr. Brooke did not please, but he said : “ Let him come in. ” Of course he knew what next—had he not read it in Mary Martha’s face last night ?

George had driven up in his triumphal chariot, as he had re-named his sledge, and had left it outside in charge of a small groom-

boy. He had his fur coat on, and his fine beard had ruffled and curled in the frost. Mr. Brooke could not deny him the praise of having a manly presence, and an air of confidence tempered with respect for his betters. George was feeling uncommonly happy. He was much too well pleased with himself and Mary Martha, and too sure of her perfect steadfastness to have any fears. When they had exchanged the customary compliments, and George had seated himself between the window and the table, in the full light, he made a pause, and Mr. Brooke regarded him coolly, waiting to hear what he had come to say. He had not long to wait; George proceeded with what he had come to say, which was plainly to ask for Mary Martha.

“We have known each other for nearly three years, and yesterday, driving up here in the snow, I asked if she did not think we might make a longer journey together contentedly enough. She thought we might, and

I am here for your consent," was his simple plea.

"Just what I expected," said Mr. Brooke in his quiet undertone. George's spirits rose a key higher, and he looked most proud and glad to have met his expectations so precisely. "But I have other views for her," the old gentleman went on, not once moving his eyes from George's face. At that information George was very properly serious, but not one whit abated of his joyful confidence. "*Other views*," Mr. Brooke repeated, and stopped, as if this must surely be answer enough for any reasonable suitor.

George did not take it so, but he was not in a hurry to deprecate those other views, which he felt small concern for. What harm could they do him? He left the argument he had put forward to work silently for a minute; it was the best he had, and in his judgment incontrovertible.

Mr. Brooke had not much weighed it yet. "I heard that you were going to Spain at the

turn of the year : I advise you to go to Spain," he said.

"I shall go to Spain, sir, because I have engaged to do so ; but, please God, I shall come home again—and *then*?" George's query was full of force and faith.

"And *then*, and *then*—it will be time enough to know what *then* when you do come home again," Mr. Brooke answered with a testy humour, and as George still withheld his fire, he added : "I am not prepared to part with my young kinswoman for any man's sake ! I cannot entertain your proposal."

George heard this with mingled feelings. He was pleased with the testimony to Mary Martha's precious virtues, and bore his own to them also, saying that she deserved all the affection and trust and generous kindness that she won. But there was much more to say. Mr. Brooke implied nothing positively adverse to his pretensions, he said only that he had "other views" for his niece. Well, it was not likely that M. M. would enter into

those other views. She had her own views, felt and confessed. There might be this urged, that he had not sought her when she was a poor young lady, and possibly this thought was indistinctly shaping itself in Mr. Brooke's mind ; but *he* knew better, and *she* knew better—or would, when she received from Mrs. Holland that deferred letter which he had already written to the dear old lady to send her. However, he did not wish to play this card against Mr. Brooke, nor to repel a suspicion that might never be formulated, though as it had found mention amongst his own people as a probable hindrance to his suit, he need not shrink from the silent recognition of it.

“You cannot entertain my proposal at the present moment because it has come upon you without sufficient warning, but you will not forbid me to speak of it again, since I have Miss Brooke's consent ?” he said with a cool determination that provoked the Squire.

“I do forbid you to speak of it again.

This is not the time to speak of it. She does not know herself or her position yet ; she knows nothing of what her new circumstances involve. If you have cared for her three years without telling your—your *love*, in my poor judgment you would have done more honourably by her, and by yourself—yes, by *yourself*, sir, if you had held your peace for another year, until she has learnt the difference between now and then. You have taken an unfair advantage of her inexperience, and I forbid you to speak to her, or to see her again until you have permission from me.”

Mr. Brooke had the appearance of a good case if he had not the reality ; most parents and guardians would have been of his side, and George was slightly perturbed. There was a pause which became irksome before either seemed disposed to break it. George was looking on the ground and reviewing *his* case, and the Squire was intently watching him. At length George spoke : “ You do me some

injustice, sir. I am not come to take away your young kinswoman with haste and violence ; but we were excellent friends before you claimed any part in her, and my title stands before yours——”

“Then it will have to be postponed to it. My authority must lapse some day, and then you can assert your title, if that has not lapsed too, which, ten to one, it will have done ; but for the present I forbid all communication between you. I am not afraid of treachery or deceit.”

“If you will be tyrannical, sir, you may fear everything,” said George, feeling for the moment that to keep terms with this tyrant was not to be required or expected of either of them.

Mr. Brooke did not condescend to answer a threat, but assumed the manner of waiting for George to go. George did not go, however, his spirit was up, and he went on urging his case : “I am not implying that deceit or treachery will be practised against you, sir ;

they are not in my character, nor in hers, I am sure ; but they will only not be practised because I must speak to her and see her openly. It is my right and hers, and I must not permit you to deny it."

"Shall I send for her now, at once?" said Mr. Brooke, growing cooler, and reaching out his hand to the bell.

"I must see her alone."

"You will not see her alone. I will have no promises, or pledges, or engagement between you. Go to Spain; I will be your ambassador to her, to make all the explanations that are necessary." Mr. Brooke reached out his hand to the bell again, and this time he rang it. Dekker appeared in the doorway, and George understood that the interview was at an end.

Was he discouraged? Not a bit of it, neither subdued nor discouraged. A little difficulty and opposition was all it needed to give his passion a touch of the heroic. Taking him in his every-day humour, he was

too confident, strong and easy. Fine health and a fine temper are a great fortune ; the tragedy of life has seldom a chance of getting the better of a man and a lover who is rich in them. So George mounted into his sledge and drove away, his bells ringing as joyously as if "yea" and not "nay" had been the tough old Squire's answer to his petition. He would have "yea" another day, that was all, and he supposed they could wait for a change in the wind of his favour.

Mr. Brooke was not nearly so comfortable, or so satisfied with the results of the interview, though he had the upper hand as yet. He was only at the beginning of troubles, and worse was to come. He was afraid of the embassy that he had undertaken. To answer George had not been hard, because he knew what he wanted to say, and felt while saying it that the young fellow was presuming and over-bold, and had earned a firm check and rebuke ; but to speak to Mary Martha, to open the business to her, innocent,

unexpected of harm, that would be very hard, and he did not like to think of it. He liked thinking of it still less when presently they met at luncheon, and she asked, in her cheerfulest voice, what they were to do in the afternoon, remarking, as by the way, that she believed it was still freezing. They only took a walk, however, and had music after tea and reading after dinner. The next morning, work, then feeding the pigeons, luncheon, and a walk again. All this while Mary Martha had an air of listening and looking out, and often she fell into a reverie—even with her pen in her hand she did, and bit the feather end of it between her little white teeth, gazing out of doors meanwhile as one lost in thought. She neglected the *Standard*, and was found not to have mastered one half of the paragraphs marked when her Uncle Richard was wanting to discuss the news. As for “Lorna Doone,” or whatever was her novel in reading, she never opened it on these days.

It was after breakfast on the third morning

that Mr. Brooke essayed to play his part of plenipotentiary. M. M. had received letters out of the post-bag, one of them being from Mrs. Holland with George's hapless letter enclosed, and her face had told such mirthful blushing tales as she read it that the old man judged the hour to speak was come, and so he began : " I have something to say to you very serious. Are you at liberty to listen to me ?"

" Oh, yes, Uncle Richard." M. M. gathered up her letters, and took that chair by the fireside which she customarily occupied when they spent the evenings in the study. There was a convenient reading-table at her elbow fitted with a brass holder for candles, and there was the book that had occupied them the night before. She made a feint of seeing what it was, and then gave him her attention, a rather wistful attention, for neither his voice nor his manner was very propitious.

" It is of Mr. George Marriott that I have to speak to you ; he was with me the day

before yesterday, to make a certain proposal which he confessed he had made previously to you, and to which he had received a favourable answer. I was not so gracious. I dismissed his proposal as one that I could not entertain, advising him to put the sea between you, and go to Spain."

Mary Martha was grave enough at the outset of this speech, but at the conclusion, with a face of gentle amusement, she inquired: "Were you in earnest, Uncle Richard?"

"I was quite in earnest, and so he understood me. No mistake about it at all"—this a little grimly.

"He will not give me up unless we quarrel between ourselves," M. M. rejoined.

She looked so debonnair in saying this that Mr. Brooke could not answer her. Those pleasant morning eyes of hers were so good that it was impossible to meet them and be angry. He felt, indeed, something exceedingly like shame; and she slipped away out of the room, and left her tasks undone

that day. There were many windows at the Tower from which the windings of the road could be seen, but they were best seen from the middle window of the long drawing-room ; and with a sweet thought of making up to George for her Uncle Richard's unkindness, thither Mary Martha went to watch for his passing—if he chanced to pass. She had not to watch very long before the familiar vision of the sledge appeared on the far white road, and he in it. His company was Mary and Myra Standish, and he was driving down to Hardenware—" Ah, how I do envy them !" she said with a tender smile that had nothing but love in it. And on that vision she lived another four-and-twenty hours.

After this she began to look for a message from George, and failing that, to wish her Uncle Richard would speak of him again, if only to give her the opportunity of being more explicit. She was keeping up her spirits fairly and not losing her temper. Both of them were looking forward to Sunday. But on

Sunday morning the brightness of the frost was gone ; and the thaw had begun with a dense rain. Mr. Brooke set his face to the window, and remarked : " There will be no church for us to-day." Then, indeed, M. M.'s countenance changed, and tears, actual tears, rose to her eyes. She gazed at the hopeless weather too, and her reflections were very grave indeed.

It was difficult to keep feelings and fancies out of Letts's diary that afternoon, but she did it, with some contrivance and indulgence of another sort of humour. The entries were not made day by day, but remitted to the Sunday afternoons, a safe plan for keeping out feelings and fancies of a casual and transitory nature. The incidents of the week last past appeared thus : "*Monday.*—Helen Carter called for me to go to the ice. Met the sledge on the road, and had a lovely drive to Esterling first. Question and answer—conversation following. To the pool later. Uncle Richard in the zigzag as we were com-

ing back. Bells in the air. *Tuesday*.—Mr. George Marriott called upon Uncle Richard, to consult him. Uncle Richard told him to go to Spain. *Thursday*.—Uncle Richard took me into his confidence, and learnt that our opinions might differ. Bells on the road with fair Americans. *Sunday*.—No church. Thaw and rain. ‘Be the day weary or be the day long, It ringeth at last to even-song.—’”

On the Monday morning, for anything that appeared to the contrary, Mr. Brooke had forgotten Mary Martha’s sentimental affairs as completely as his own. After breakfast he gave her a fresh piece of copying to begin, which would not be soon finished, and composed himself in his chair by the fire-side, to enjoy the March chapters of “No New Thing.” M. M. had peeped at the illustrations, and read a few lines between the uncut pages, but now she set herself in order to work. Her errors of transcription were many and great that morning, and she dropt

her quill full of ink twice—*twice*. She tried not to let her mind wander, but it resisted her conscientious effort, and was away to George continually. The rain had abated since yesterday, or rather had turned into solid mist, as blank in front of the windows as a sheet of blotting paper. Down at Stockleigh it was quite dreadful, worse and more dreary than on the hill-top. George and his mother were in her morning-room together, talking of the poor prisoner at the Tower.

“I cannot endure this suspense any longer, mother—and just think of *her*. I must do something—go and quarrel with Mr. Brooke if I can do no better,” George said in a voice of remonstrance, keen and reproachful, and kept marching to and fro with limited impetuosity amongst the chairs and tables.

Mrs. Marriott stood looking out into the cold mist. “You are not asking me to call upon Miss Brooke in such weather as this, George?” she said, perhaps with regret for her delayings, now that regret was too late.

George was silent, perhaps sulky. His mother spoke again. "I don't recommend you to quarrel with Mr. Brooke. Your father thinks you have not much to complain of, if you get fair-play after your journey to Spain. He declares that he would allow you no more liberty himself—you must live on hope."

"My father does not consider all the circumstances."

"Your father is not in love. And, George, if you cannot trust the young lady to keep you in mind another six months unless you are tied and bound by a solemn promise and vow, what is her fancy worth?"

"I can trust her as I trust myself, but let me tell her so. Mr. Brooke says that he has 'other views' for her, and forbids me to write to her or to see her. Is that fair-play? I call it most unreasonable. I must see her; if not with Mr. Brooke's leave, then without it. By hook or by crook I will see her before I go."

"Don't be foolish, George."

George, however, was bent on being foolish, or wise in his own way, and he determined, while the mist was there to mask his approach, to besiege the Tower with a second summons of surrender ; or, at least, of parley with the prisoner. His courage mounted as the road flew behind him, and when he came through the old archway with long, swinging stride, some sound of his step or thrill of his spirit went before him, and caused Mary Martha to look up and cease from troubling about her many mistakes and shockingly blotted manuscript. A lovely colour overspread her face, and the next minute she said softly, as if giving a warning that must not be overheard, "Uncle Richard, here is Mr. George Marriott arriving again." Mr. Brooke was at a pause in his reading, and had not to collect his faculties. "Stay where you are," was his short reply to her communication ; and when Dekker asked at the door if he would see the visitor, he said, "Yes ; show him in." And thus abruptly were the interesting

young people brought face to face in his presence.

George was equal to the shock. It was Mary Martha who trembled, and Mr. Brooke who was astonished and confused. He perceived upon the instant of their meeting that the lovers were truly lovers, and very tender and reverent of one another. But he was master of the situation for all that, and did not mean to yield a foot to either of them. George stood to his colours boldly, but M. M. had an air of being called up to judgment, not to say execution, and her countenance was pale, timid, deprecating; so much so, indeed, that her Uncle Richard made haste to answer her dumb pleading looks without waiting for tears or words. She had nothing of harshness to fear from him, and he told her that she had not; but he told her too that he had a certain claim on her obedience, and to refuse it would be no good omen for her after-life. Then to George, with more severity, he said that a year's probation he

would have, dating it from his grand-niece's coming to the Tower; and until that was ended, no more interviews, no correspondence, and no engagement—no open sign, in short, of their having consented together to be more than friends.

Mary Martha's beautiful colour and clear-eyed calm returned; she even ventured to look at George, to see what he thought of these terms. George did not like the terms. He found them unequal. In rough quarters, with rude companions, railway-making in Spain, he might nurse his hopes and cherish his love for Mary Martha while she, dear innocent child, was being led unawares into all manner of temptation: caressed at Crosby, admired everywhere, carried to town by old Lady Malvern, even to Court perhaps, and out of his reach, loving him all the while—for he could not mistrust her brave affectionate little heart, before the very face of her. She perceived that all was not right to his mind, and sighed that it should be so. Her

idea was that Uncle Richard asked no very hard sacrifice. They were only required to go on for a year longer as they had gone on last year—but with the secret sweet confession and mutual assurance of their love to keep them in comfort. What was a single year? M. M. was a moderate soul. She lived and felt with measure. Depths of tragedy there might be in her circumstances, but in her character there were none. So she looked up at George again, who turned to Mr. Brooke.

“I start on Thursday week, sir. You will allow us a final leave-taking before my departure?” he said, with still his confident tone of appealing to reason and common-sense.

“This must be your leave-taking,” Mr. Brooke answered.

“You cannot deny us the privilege of an occasional interchange of letters?” It seemed that the young man would lose nothing for want of courage in asking for it: but Mr. Brooke did not admit his claim to the privilege.

"There are to be no letters. I have *spoken*," he said strongly; and Mary Martha put out her hand with a gesture of entreating George to be satisfied—as she was.

"I shall be awfully lonely out there," he said, moving her pity and her sense of humour too.

Though her eyes were tearful there was a charming radiancy about her again when George took her hand, and feeling it desperately hard to let it go, stood perusing her dear face, while the old squire was waxing quite cruelly impatient to hear and see the last of him.

"Tell your mother to be good to me," Mary Martha whispered. At that George bent his head and touched her hand with his lips; then to Mr. Brooke he made a profound bow, implying bitter defiance and wrath, his retort-courteous to the half-sarcastic, wholly triumphant nod of dismissal that was all the old squire condescended to give him by way of good-morning.

CHAPTER II.

A VISIT.

“The course of true love never did run smooth.”

SHAKSPEARE.

MARY MARTHA was not quite able to enter into George's lively sense of ill-usage. She read the displeasure and resentment in his countenance, and rather wondered at them. When he told his story at home, his father and mother not only wondered at his angry discomposure, but rebuked him for it. In fact he found little sympathy anywhere. He gave M. M.'s sweet little message to his mother, who promised to be good to the dear child, but asked what chances of being good to her she was likely to have. George besought his sister, the vicar's wife at Hardenware, diligently to improve, for his

sake, the very slight acquaintance that was begun between her and Miss Brooke ; and Mrs. Howe pledged him her earnest endeavours on his behalf. Amy was indeed his strongest advocate. Amy was romantic, and conjured up ends fit for poetical justice to the Brooke-Marriott feud and the Brooke-Marriott trust.

“A year will soon pass, George, two months are gone already ; and I suppose you will come home for Christmas ?” she inquired. George said that she might be sure that he would come home the first day of his freedom—unless circumstances arose to make his continued absence desirable. Then Amy tried to comfort him. “Don’t be despondent, dear—it seems so unnatural, so unlike you. I say as mother says : if she is not faithful and true, what is she worth ? A year’s separation, my dear boy, to find yourselves out, is the lightest strain you’ll have. Better learn to endure a little hardness beforehand. Marriage with true love is a blessed condition,

but it needs the true love to make soft and easy all that blessed condition brings. Accept these words of wisdom from a wife who has earned her knowledge. But keep up your heart, and go on hoping all that your heart desires."

George, if he had been only half as grateful as he ought, would have recognized this superior advantage in his fortune, that he could talk about it and take counsel. Mary Martha had to hold her tongue and shut her mind entirely. The moment the study door closed upon George, Mr. Brooke laid hold of the *Standard* which Dekker brought in, and M. M. turned back to her work, for want of impulse to make any other movement. It was close upon noon, however, and at the first friendly stroke of the clock she put by her writing and went to her own place, resting a few minutes in the great bay of the long drawing-room as she went, to see how the mist was breaking up in the valley and floating off before the sun and a rising wind. The scene

was very beautiful, and struck her so. Within half an hour the sky was as blue as a March sky can be, but the treetops were writhing and swaying ominously in the gusty breath of a March breeze blowing up for a gale. What a noise it presently was; and not a noise of wind only, but of rushing waters, melting snows, which went on and on till nightfall, and grew more impetuous and loud after dark with blasts and freshets of sudden rain.

There was something weird in the strange commotion which gave Mary Martha rest from herself. This tumult of the elements seemed to draw about her a curtain of awe, and she could only be quiet and watch and wait till it was peace again. And that was not for three days. And even then the weather continued fickle, cold, and rough. Mr. Brooke declined to venture beyond the quadrangle; but M. M. began to feel the house suffocating, and craved for more air. Her Uncle Richard looked at her and said

she appeared to need it; and with Grace in attendance, he sent her on an errand to Oke at his workshop. That business was quickly dispatched, and the short draught of freshness and freedom made M. M. athirst for more. Beyond the woodyard in that direction she had never been, but Grace said it was very pretty further on, and the woodcarts went that way to Hardenware. They proceeded. Here, about the roots of the sheltering trees, thick tufts of bluish-green pointed leaves bespoke the coming of snowdrops, and variegated mosses had begun to prank and pearl themselves in the sunshine after the thaw. The ground was soft and rich with the leaf-mould of a thousand summers, and parallel with the high road lower down the hill a fine avenue of great spreading oaks ran for a long distance. Miss Brooke expressed a wish to walk to the end of it, and Grace made no demur.

They walked a mile, and perhaps half another mile, and then Mary Martha

bethought her to inquire how far the end might be. Grace said they could walk to Esterling in the woods, and M. M. became aware that they had left the neighbourhood of the high road and were skirting the road to Esterling. "We must turn back. Uncle Richard will think I am lost," she said, and suited the action to the word, turning back and making good speed along the grass-grown cart-track. In going they had passed a gate which was locked. It was by that gate the woodcarts came and went to Hardenware. There the road wound more steeply down-hill, and there carts and carriages mounting it stopped to breathe the horses. In returning a carriage was there—Mr. Marriott's carriage, and himself and his wife inside. Miss Brooke looked towards it, and was seen by them.

"God bless my soul, there's George's sweetheart—lost her way in the woods, as I am alive!" cried the old gentleman, and was out on the road and calling to her directly.

Mary Martha, who was hurrying forward, retraced her steps, with a very blushing face. No, she had not lost her way, but perhaps they had been beguiled a little too far : her maid was with her, she explained, and would have hastened on again, but Mr. Marriott insisted on giving her "a lift" as far as the lodge.

"We'll set you down at the foot of the new road. Don't be afraid," he said ; and when she intimated that the gate was locked and five bars high, he pooh-poohed that difficulty and had her over in a minute.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," George's mother said, and folded one of Mary Martha's hands in both hers, looking as if it was a pleasure indeed. The girl would have liked to kiss her, but she only blushed and trembled instead.

With a pair of horses going home, the distance to the lodge at the foot of the new road was soon travelled, sooner than M. M. was prepared for. But there was time

enough for her to be assured that love waited for her at the Manor, and that dear George was all right to-day. George had, in fact, gone a-hunting. "That is the way with the young fellows; they have never a grief but they'll try to ride it down," his father said, and enjoined her to do the same, and keep a happy heart against his coming back from Spain.

Then his mother kissed her, and it was as if she set a seal to their confession and made it sacred.

Meanwhile, Mr. Brooke had tired of his own company, and being without anything new in the way of a novel, had discovered that the afternoon was not so bad, and putting on his old brown coat and plaid, was airing himself in the quadrangle. Mary Martha was a long while away, much longer than it needed to go to Oke's workshop and back, but he supposed that she had wandered deeper into the woods, tempted by the first buds of spring. When she came at last she joined him, looking her brightest, serenest,

best self, and was immediately inquired of where she had been and what had happened to cheer her. She told her adventures with the manner of giving acceptable information.

“And that has softened your fall,” was her Uncle Richard’s observation upon it.

He seemed not sorry that what he called her *fall* should be a little softened, and sounded really so willing to be pleasant about it that though her feet ached with the long rough roads she had traversed, she stayed with him on the stones of the quadrangle for the half-hour longer that he chose to keep out, and scarcely felt that they were hard. Going in together finally by the terrace door, they were just in time to see a cavalcade of gentlemen returning from the hunt, and amongst them George, riding his black horse. M. M. noticed that he looked up to the Tower as he was passing, and she made a pretence of kissing her hand to him; a pretty favour that was thrown away, with the thick old glass and all that

distance between them, unless Mr. Brooke profited by it in the further moving of his conscience.

When George reached home there was the great news for him. "We have seen her, we have had her in the carriage with us," cried his father, and wished him joy of his bonny love, but added that she was a more shy and timorous little bird than he had imagined.

"She is never alarmed with me," said George with a lover's fatuity. Then he made his mother tell him how it all happened, and how his treasure looked, and wanted to know what messages she sent him.

"She sent you none—she was loving *me* all the time," was the provoking answer. But George was not provoked—he was not there, which accounted for it.

But when all the daring and rallying and jesting were done there remained two young people, of lively temperament and very much

in love, divided, sent their separate ways, and forbidden all intercourse of speech or pen for ten long months to come. Sadder cases have been known, but that is not to the point ; and George was not consoled by being told so. Those "other views" which Mr. Brooke had mentioned loomed more large before his recollection than they had at all threatened to do when originally presented. Of course, they could only concern the establishment in life of his grand niece. He was no doubt counting on the simple effects of absence to prepare Mary Martha for "other views" also. And here George himself fell to reflecting how she was in the era of rapid development. He recalled what had struck him as surprising growth and advance in the time between her leaving Thornhill and his seeing her again at St. Croix last year, and knew that the action of the next ten months was not likely to be less but more. *Her* mind was not exercised in this way at all. She never pictured to

herself any change coming over George, until they both grew old—*old* like his father and mother, who were beautiful old people and devoted to one another. Whether Mr. Brooke's "other views" for her were tangible yet, or merely in the clouds, George had no means of ascertaining. His own knowledge and his father's knowledge of Mr. Brooke's friends and private views were of the slightest, and he had not any—not the most remote—suspicion of a rival in the man who was actually named for the part. His acquaintance with Mr. James Grimston was general rather than particular. Grimston was ten or twelve years his senior. He thought him a handsome fellow, a noble fellow, and had often compassionated his ill-luck; but it never occurred to him that Mr. Brooke, who had made this son of a ruined house his son by adoption, might be designing to crown his benefits by marrying him to his grand-niece and making them his joint-heirs. Nor had the likelihood of such an

arrangement offered itself to the imaginations of less interested persons; but within the next few days, and even before George went to Spain, there was what people who never allow themselves to be at fault, referred to later as a glimpse and fore-shadowing of it.

The weather was no sooner settled again, after the lion-like coming in of March, than the neighbourhood a few miles beyond Stockleigh bestirred itself, and every day some mother and daughter of a county family drove to the Tower to make a visit of ceremony to Miss Brooke. Mrs. Bingham called with two daughters and her son Surtees, and afterwards drove through the village to take tea with Mrs. Carter. Lady Malvern came with a tall rugged girl, her grandchild, said to be brought from Ireland to be civilized before her showing to the world. Lady Malvern came a long distance, and paid a long visit. She was a fair, plump, sweet old lady, with dull, kind eyes, and

the charming manner of a great lady who is also a lovely character. She said gracious, pretty things to Mary Martha on her coming *home*, and then sat talking apart with Mr. Brooke, wittily, pleasantly and gently, as to a dear old friend whom she seldom met in these days, but was always glad to meet. This was her gratitude for ancient love and service, which Mr. Brooke might perhaps appreciate still.

The young people were left to themselves. The rugged girl gazed at Mary Martha, and was very difficult to make speak until she set herself going, and then she was as difficult to stop. They did not get on at all until, to the abrupt question whether she rode to hounds, M. M. answered that she had never done so, but she should not mind trying if she had the chance; which elicited a laugh of derision, then a word of apology, and after that a paragraph of information about herself, prefaced by her name which, she said Lady Malvern never mentioned, but always intro-

duced her as, "My grand-daughter from Ireland."

"I am Lady Dulcy Carleton—'a wild Irish heiress,' they call me. I have neither father nor mother living, and brother or sister I never had. I have been told who you are, and how you were brought up, and that you are an heiress too. You have lived in a sort of groove, gran'ma says, and it would be good for me to have such a friend. But you do not look *groovy*. I wish you might come back with us to Castle-Island to-day. The Meet is there on Monday, and Lord Malvern gives a breakfast. It is a pretty sight, if it is nothing else ; but it is nonsense to think of riding to hounds if you were not born to it. I rode before I walked. My father used to see me in front of him and gallop like mad. Then, as soon as I could sit, he had a little saddle made for me ; but unfortunately there was no one to tell him to take care I changed sides, so that I grew crooked." Here she paused as if she must

draw breath after telling a catastrophe of so much moment.

Mary Martha looked sorry, but said that she did not see how she was crooked.

“I am, though—quite deformed. My tailor makes me fit to be seen, that is all. Gran’ma does not know how misshapen I am, and no one dares tell her. I don’t suffer, I am very strong, and that makes it more melancholy. I feel discontented, and then dear, pretty gran’ma says if I would *only* look happy I should be beautiful.”

Lady Dulcy had beautiful aspects even when she was not looking happy. She set herself to gaze at Mary Martha again, as if she were considering her with admiration. “Why do you stare at me so?” M. M. asked, half-amused, half-affronted.

“I was thinking that you must live habitually with good thoughts,” was the answer, at which M. M. frowned in perplexity. “Now *I*”—the rugged girl went on as if she were in

the confessional—"I have visitations of most wicked thoughts and feelings."

"They come from the Evil One," M. M. said, without the least doubt of it, and in a stern voice, as if bidding the Evil One, there and then, Avaunt!

Lady Dulcy laughed, then sobered as suddenly: "I want them to let me go back to the convent. All the heart's desire I have left is to enter the religious life."

"No riding to hounds there!" cried Mary Martha pathetically under her breath.

They were becoming too serious for new-made friends, and she struck a jarring chord to arrest this strain in the minor. Lady Dulcy was dumb for ten minutes after, and let M. M. flow on in lighter music—showers, spring-flowers, and that kind of thing; but presently broke silence, as if she had not been listening, but musing of her own matters: "Now gran'ma is begging for you to come away to Castle-Island with us—you would be pleased to come?"

“I don’t know. I have not thought of it. Who is pleased to be disposed of without being consulted?” M. M. replied, and looked over towards the old people.

Her Uncle Richard was rising to ring the bell. Grace appeared. “Can you make your mistress and yourself ready within an hour to go to Castle-Island?” she was asked, and answered without hesitation that she could. Mr. Brooke dismissed her to do it; and Mary Martha, warned by such direct intimations that there was only to acquiesce, unless she was prepared to refuse obedience to authority, which, in secondary matters, she told herself she was not, went to make herself ready also. It seemed inconsiderate, and she hoped that her Uncle Richard would repent sending her away in this hasty fashion. But, on the contrary, her Uncle Richard was pleased with the chance of sending her away, and proposed to be perfectly comfortable and easy in her absence.

It was a silent drive. Lady Malvern was

tired ; she had gained the object of her visit, and soon sank into a doze. Lady Dulcy said a few words of being pleased to carry off her new friend, and then folded herself away in her own reflections. Mary Martha was glad enough to be quiet, after so many emotions and surprises. She rested tranquilly in her corner of the carriage, and watched the hedges and trees fly past, as the swift horses trotted evenly along the road to Esterling, to Crosby, and down the wooded slopes of the Harden Hills into the low country, where the river gleamed in winding reaches, and broad shallows towards the head of the valley. The night had closed in before they came in sight of Castle-Island. A long stone bridge of many arches, stretching across the flooded land on either side the bed of the stream, was the approach to the domain, which lay at this season a veritable island, completely surrounded by a sweeping curve of the river, though in drougthy summers the water receded and left vast beds of gravel with only

glancing pools between, amongst which it was easy to thread the way over dry-shod.

Traversing the bridge made a change of sound from the solid roads, and Lady Malvern awoke, knowing herself near home ; Lady Dulcy emerged from her dreams too ; and Mary Martha had some little stirrings of curiosity for what was to come. Satisfaction she felt none in this unprepared visit, which was not, indeed, undertaken with any view to her satisfaction. Lady Malvern had invited her to make friends with that rugged girl who was eating out her heart for dulness at Castle-Island ; and Mr. Brooke had consented to her going because there she would be safe out of the way, as he believed, until George Marriott had left England. This fact had dawned on her mind in the shape of a suspicion midway the journey, and had been received with mischievous glee. What if George should appear at the meet on Monday ? and at the end of the way she was in radiant humour,

indulging hopes that George actually would appear.

The night was not so dark but that a stranger, with an eye for the picturesque, could make out the impending mass of the mimic castle which gave the place its name. It had nothing to recommend it but singularity of situation, and that it was in the midst of the owner's property in this county. Mary Martha had now to be thankful for Grace who knew what to do, and the ways of a great house. Lady Malvern led her visitor by the hand upstairs, opened a door for her to go in, and left her. Lady Dulcy had vanished in the hall. But quick as thought Grace was there, and bringing hot water, and making the fire blaze up. The room was all in array, and with the information that there was no other company in the house, Grace dressed her young lady in her black velvet gown, and sent her downstairs at the moment Lady Malvern was passing down too. They entered the drawing-room together, hand in

hand, as they had gone up, and found Lord Malvern standing on the hearthrug with his back to the fire, a fine tall stout gentleman, loud and talkative, who announced two or three times, that he had got in only half an hour before them, and seemed to have some difficulty in making out how the young lady who was presented to him as "Miss Brooke" came to be there. His wife said it was of no use, and then began to explain, speaking in a high voice as if he were hard of hearing.

"Richard Brooke's grand-niece, Frank—you remember? the girl who gets Harden Tower and half Hardenware. Dulcy wants company, and two such wonderful great fortunes should have a fellow-feeling. In the way of an experiment how to choose a friend I think it promises well, and hope it may succeed with both of them."

Lord Malvern looked down on the carpet at his feet, and solemnly pronounced; "Dulcy would show herself a wiser woman if she married her Cousin Robert. There's no

friend for a woman like a husband who loves her. Eh, my lady? is not that your opinion?"

"Hush-sh, Frank! It is all past and over with Cousin Robert; and so let bygones be bygones."

Lady Malvern was accustomed to put her meaning into phrases that struck her lord's ear and fixed in his memory—inconvenient sometimes. At this moment Lady Dulcy came in, and he stepped to meet her, repeating: "It is all past and over with Cousin Robert; and so let bygones be bygones." The rugged girl looked up with indescribably softened eyes, and said very gently: "Yes, that is best." Then turned to Miss Brooke with a gesture that said: Now you know my whole story. M. M.'s countenance answered: Yes, now I understand.

At dinner Lord Malvern ate and drank copiously, and towards the end of it fell into a heavy sleep.

"We will let him alone. He is always drowsy after he has been justicing and

driving in the open air," his wife said ; and with this tender plea signed to the girls to take what dessert they wanted and come away.

She slept again herself on a big sofa, and under a red quilted silk duvet in the drawing-room. Lady Dulcy invited Miss Brooke to a seat remote from the fire, and, being indisposed for conversation, gave her books of photographs for her amusement. When bedtime came, it was a happy release for everybody. Castle-Island was a perfect Sleepy Hollow.

The Sunday morning church-bell awoke the house at six, and by degrees people got up. It was a cold, blowy, wet morning, and the flood waters were spreading. The weather was boisterous, but presently the visitor heard voices below her window, which overlooked the gate, and then the noise of wheels and horses. Was it an arrival or a departure ? It was a departure —Lady Dulcy Carleton going off to the

Roman Catholic Church at Hardenware, in her own equipage, and with her own Irish servants. She would be gone all day. After hearing mass it was her custom to retire to a house of Sisters of the Poor, and there to spend the afternoon.

The church at Castle-Island was on the domain and served by the rector of the parish, being within the ecclesiastical radius from his own church. The attendance was very scanty; only the family, the household, and the people employed on the place out of doors. One service was all, and unfortunately the weather did not mend. Mary Martha had seldom felt a day so long. She had not brought her diary, to write her notes of the week. In the haste of coming away it had not been remembered, and she missed that recitation of events. It would have provided her with occupation.

Lady Dulcy returned from Hardenware a little before six o'clock, and with her arrived another visitor, Mr. James Grimston.

"I have brought him, gran'pa!" she announced in a voice anticipatory of congratulations as they entered the drawing-room together.

She was abundantly thanked. Lord Malvern grasped the hand of this guest, and went on welcoming him for the next ten minutes—quite forgetting that he had seen him only yesterday; and perhaps because he noticed that the new-comer looked towards Miss Brooke, he said to her with a shower of confidential nods: "Grimston, you must know, is a prime favourite of ours;" on which James, still held fast by his host, said expressively, "*You* here?"

Mary Martha said, "Yes! I have been thinking two or three times to-day whether you might by good luck have gone up to the Tower last night. Uncle Richard is left alone."

"He will not mind that. It will be like a return to old times again."

"You will go and see him while I am

away? I fancy that he will miss me, though you do not think so."

Lord Malvern demanded Grimston's attention again, and went into a discursive history of his plans and expectations for the next day; always recurring to the material point that the weather must take up, and that Grimston was to ride the "Fenian" and Lady Dulcy "Lad's Love." Miss Brooke's listening face caught his vague and wandering eye at one moment, and he hospitably bethought him that it would not do to leave her out, but could not get beyond that idea to the next of finding her a mount.

Some chance word turned the current of his ideas into another channel, and at dinner all his talk was of the poor at Hardenware suffering from the floods, every now and then a shrewd touch coming out like his former self. "If I had my time over again, Grimston, I would try to remedy a thing or two. It hurt me yesterday, that it did, to see the women and bits of children look-

ing out at the water lapping up to their door-stones. How was the river when you crossed the bridge to-day?"

"Rising, still rising, and running like a mill-race. The people were crowding the bridge as we came over."

"Cold comfort, poor souls, watching the river that washes 'em out o' doors twice or thrice in a winter. They ought to be better cared for. *Cared* for," he reiterated with a slow effort, as if feeling after some meaning in the words that evaded him. Again his eyes rested on Mary Martha's face, and he recited his wife's description of her. "Richard Brooke's gran'-niece; the girl who gets Harden Tower and half Hardenware. They have a saying along shore at Hardenware,"—he looked upon the ground, putting his hand to his head—"Nay; it's gone! I had it a minute ago."

"It will come back presently, Frank," cried Lady Malvern. Then to the others she remarked with a gentle little laugh, "Memory

begins to play hide-and-seek with us—we must be growing old, my lord and I.” Everything went on the assumption that nothing ailed my lord.

In the drawing-room afterwards Lady Dulcy and Mr. Grimston had a conversation, at which Miss Brooke assisted. It began about the house of the Catholic Sisters in Hardenware, for the preservation of which Lady Dulcy was commissioned to plead.

“It will have to come down,” Grimston said. “It is condemned already. Not a tenement will be left standing in the Boundary Walks. The holder of the lease deserves no mercy.”

“It is not he who will suffer most. The Sisters are in a terrible crisis. Where are they to go? Will you drive them to a hulk on the river?”

“Some shelter will be found for them—
- they are too good and useful to be lost. The professional people are fast forsaking

Branksome Street for villas at Mayfield. There are gardens in Branksome Street behind those tall old houses. One of those might suit the Sisters."

Lady Dulcy nodded thoughtfully. "So it might—unless it be too far from their poor. They must be in the midst of the people or half their energies are wasted."

"The Great Mead will have its wild undergrowth of misery weeded out. The Sisters might cling to the Great Mead and find their occupation gone."

"The Great Mead? That is my share of Hardenware," Mary Martha said consideringly.

"Not yet," Grimston answered with a grave smile. "Not just yet. We mean to reconvert it into a scene more worthy of its name before it is your inheritance."

"I wish you may. It has little enough of meadow-green or sweetness now. Are the masons at work again in the Four Acres?"

Mr. Grimston supposed so; but he had not been down into the Four Acres since the frost broke.

“We will drive into Hardenware, you and I, the first fine morning after to-morrow, and see for ourselves what is doing,” Lady Dulcy said to her new friend with a little patronizing nod. This rugged girl was a princess in her way, and had been served, metaphorically, by people who knelt to her. But happy fortune had not fallen at her feet, alas! alas! and she was seeking how and where to work herself out another salvation than that of earthly love. It had come into her heart that she might find it amongst those Sisters of the Poor, whose guests she was on Sundays.

Mary Martha felt intuitively what turn she was taking, but Mr. Grimston, who knew only what all the world knew, immediately offered the hospitality of his mother’s house, and his own escort and guidance to the young ladies. “If you say the first fine morning after

to-morrow, I shall know when to look for you. Be at the dower-house by twelve o'clock, and I will meet you. My mother keeps French hours, which are also best for me—*déjeuner* at noon. Afterwards, we will go wherever it pleases you."

"That will be very convenient—don't you think so?" Lady Dulcy said, taking the opinion of her sister-heiress this time, and without her little nod.

Miss Brooke entirely approved the arrangement, and gave thanks to the proposer of it. She had not seen Hardenware since the day of the foundation-stone, and she wanted to see it again, and particularly what progress was making with the vicar's new buildings.

CHAPTER III.

A MORNING'S RIDE.

"A hardy race of mortals, train'd to sports ;
The field their joy."—LUCRETIVS.

THE next morning broke fair though cloudy, and the wind had fallen. Grace brought in to her mistress a complete equipment for riding, with a message from Lady Dulcy Carleton that she must put it on and be ready at half-past ten. There was a large muster of gentlemen and a few ladies, who would have been more but for the waters out. To see Lord Malvern welcoming his friends was a kindly sight. Every one met him with a gay and gracious cordiality like his own, and if any said, "Poor fellow," it was added to the better word that he was as great a gentleman and as noble a heart as

any in England. *Seventy-eight*, and a fine, strong, florid presence yet, something like the national oak, which, having passed its age, stands a winter or two withering atop. Lady Malvern received many compliments for him, and nothing gratified her more. She was as fond and proud of him as when she disappointed Richard Brooke, and her first love whistled her back—a sunny, happy, fair old lady, whose laugh was music and whose airs and graces kept the perfume of her younger fascination. Mary Martha did not know at this time that she was the lady for whose sake her Uncle Richard was a sworn bachelor, but she was amused and charmed by her in this lively scene, as she might have been by some perfectly portrayed character in a book. Castle Island was no Sleepy Hollow this morning, but more like a horse-fair, with men and horses crowding over the bridge, and walking to and fro the green lawns.

Lady Dulcy Carleton was ready for a hard

day's riding, and looked like it, but Miss Brooke was spick and span in a crimson necktie, silk hat, and lovely new habit never worn before. Lady Dulcy made her a fine bow, signifying extreme approbation, and then proceeded to put her at her ease as to the part she was to have in the morning's pleasure. "You are to ride with gran'pa and Mr. Grimston; Mr. Grimston has settled all that. Gran'pa does not follow the hounds; he takes only a point of view here and there; but you will see quite as much of the hunt in his company as you are likely to care for."

Miss Brooke was recognized in the house by Mr. Fynes of Markby, and Mr. Bingham of Deane; by Mr. Surtees Bingham too, who was less formal in clerical hunting dress than in the railway carriage with his father going on church business. The trustees each inquired for Mr. Brooke, and were pleasant and congratulatory to herself, offering their services, for which she was prettily obliged,

but said that she believed she was in Mr. Grimston's charge. The breakfast was over then, and gentlemen were hurrying out of doors—but of George Marriott there was no sign, either indoors or out. Mary Martha's lovely countenance wore a grave and serious cast.

“Is anything amiss?” Lady Dulcy said, and not staying for an answer:—“Confess, now, that I am good to you. I am lending you my ‘Lady Beauty,’ the easiest goer in the world.”

M. M. was grateful, and Lady Dulcy, in response to an inquiry rather suggested than spoken by her, said, “I ride with Jack, or Jack rides with me, whichever anybody pleases. But I never stir without Jack—” indicating a small middle-aged man in a green coat and long boots, who had gone with the carriage yesterday, and who was at the moment leading up “Lad's Love” for his mistress to mount.

Lady Dulcy went away, and soon there

was almost a clearance in front of the house. Then appeared "Lady Beauty" curveting at the conclusion of a preliminary canter which Mr. Grimston had prescribed on behalf of her new rider. He did not ask Miss Brooke if she was nervous, but put her up in the saddle, saying that she would find the mare's motion as easy as a rocking-chair; which she did not quite, but much easier than any of the riding-master's horses that she had been acquainted with. The "Fenian" was waiting, and they rode across the bridge together.

"Are you to have no sport, then?" Mary Martha asked him.

He said that he had not come for sport, but to accompany Lord Malvern, and to find himself in charge of her was a pleasure added to duty.

M. M. brightened. "I was very glad to see you come in last night. It is dull here;" and then she gave him an account of the uncere-monious style in which she had been brought off to Castle Island.

They overtook Lord Malvern and Mr. Surtees Bingham on high ground overlooking a wide extent of open country. At one point the view had the appearance of a lake, and though the sky was grey over all, yet there was a coming greenness on the hills and fields which made the natural landscape refreshing and very agreeable. The huntsman and hounds were well on the way to a dark expanse of heath and woodland where they never failed to find a fox; the gentlemen, with a motley increase of numbers, were trotting mostly along the road.

"You are lucky to be in Grimston's care, Miss Brooke—you will need none else," Mr. Surtees Bingham began to say to her. "These other two fellows, my cousin of Deane, and Fynes, are such inveterate fox-hunters, they'd leave their own wives and sisters in the lurch at a view-halloo."

"Don't fancy they'd leave Miss Brooke in the lurch," Lord Malvern observed, and bowed with a courteous intimation that she

must ride forward with himself. "You have not been in the hunting-field before," he said presently ; and, indeed, that was not difficult to see. "My lady never enjoyed it either. I cannot pretend that I regret she did not. But Dulcy, she's Irish, like her father, and loves nothing so dearly as a gallop across country ahead of the crowd—if she can keep there. Dulcy can't endure to be beat—too high a spirit, poor girl, too high a spirit. Not a bit like her mother." Here there fell a silence on the old man, perhaps of forgetfulness, perhaps of trying to remember ; for Lady Dulcy was the child of his eldest daughter, who had married and gone from her parents very young, and had been little seen by them after.

Mary Martha was well pleased to go at a foot's pace, and gaze about her in this fresh country ; for she had quite satisfied her mind that George was nowhere in her neighbourhood. She had far sight, and would have known his riding even if he had not ridden

his black horse. But he was not there. No, he was not there.

Lord Malvern spoke again. "Our old friend Brooke seldom shows amongst us now. He gave up too soon. That was a pity. A man should never give in to age and bad weather until death or the doctor tells him. Time enough to go to bed, I say, when the sun's gone down. A pleasant thing it is to see the sun, but *Monsieur le Soleil* does not pay us the compliment of shining to-day. Very remiss of *Monsieur le Soleil*." Mary Martha turned a smiling face to him, and eyes that were both glad and sad. Some expression in them opened a sudden page of the past, causing him to exclaim, "God, how like you are to young Philip Brooke! Can you be his daughter? We knew he left a daughter. He had a sister too—Fred's flame; but she married—let me see—she married——"

"The Philip Brooke you are recalling was my father," M. M. said, with always her beautiful smile.

"He and my son Fred *died* together—*same* day—*same* scrimmage."

Their further ride was nearly altogether silent. Mr. Grimston's and Mr. Surtees Bingham's voices sounded now and again behind them, but Lord Malvern seemed to have fallen lethargic, his chin sunk on his breast. There came a moment that roused him, when the bishop's chaplain galloped away, parting company with them to join the multitude following the hounds, now in full cry and full in view.

"There's music," said the old sportsman, and pulled up at a gate to watch while the hunt rushed past. They were quickly out of sight, and then he turned his horse about, to ride home.

Lady Malvern was on the look-out, not making any display of anxiety, but feeling it, as she always did when her lord rode abroad. She appeared at the door to receive him, and he began immediately to tell her that Miss Brooke was the daughter of poor

Fred's friend and comrade-in-arms, Philip Brooke. "You remember Brooke's pretty sister, and the old parsonage garden where the roses were in bloom all the year round?" he said impressively and very tenderly, laying a hand upon his wife's shoulder as he spoke.

"Yes, Frank, I remember the roses. This young lady is Richard Brooke's grand-niece—and his heiress, since her father died," looking up in his face.

"Don't know her by that name. She is Philip Brooke's daughter—Fred's friend. Told me so herself"—more shortly.

"They are one and the same, Frank."

"One and the same, are they? Fred fell in love with the sister, and she would not listen to him. I'm afraid that she did not do well for herself. Is she living, I wonder?" Lord Malvern did not direct this query to any person in particular, and was moving away as he uttered it, already forgetting what had roused his memory.

“Glimpses of unsuspected family romance,” Mary Martha remarked to Mr. Grimston, who remained standing with her a few minutes in the hall. He was on the point of going, for which, M. M. expressed a little self-pity. There were still many hours of the day to get through, and nothing to occupy them. The unaccustomed exercise of riding had refreshed and tired her, however, and she laid her hands on a book which, if it was not very good to read, gave her the air of reading, and left her free to think of something else. There was a very strained sensation at her heart when she considered that George had but this day and two more, and she was here, sent out of reach of happy chances. She felt almost like conceiving a grudge against Castle-Island; and when Lady Dulcy returned late in the afternoon, dead-beat and dull, she could not avoid the conclusion that this was a sad sort of visit, and, but for the honour of it, not a visit to be repeated.

Miss Brooke's first inquiry of Grace the next morning was as to the weather. Grace said it was like yesterday—overcast, but she did not think it would rain ; and at breakfast Lady Dulcy announced that the morning was favourable for going to Hardenware, and Jack had his orders. Lady Dulcy issued her orders with perfect independence, and Jack saw to it that they were executed. Here were no processes, no details of life for her to see to or endure. "Carriage round at ten," she said curtly, when asked at what hour she would be pleased to start ; and she just glanced at Miss Brooke and repeated : "*Ten.*" Mary Martha signified that she heard and understood, with a nod, and one word, "*Yes.*" The girls were breakfasting by themselves, and this was their laconic style. Lady Dulcy was in deep and moody thought, and M. M., in a reserved attitude of waiting, without any definite notion of what she waited for. But to be going to Har-

denware felt a little like the prelude to fresh adventures.

Lady Dulcy Carleton visited and travelled with a complete establishment of her own, of which Jack was governor. Miss Brooke, getting into her carriage, declared it to be precisely the carriage she should like to possess; compact, light, strong, easy, and, for two inside, roomy.

"It was built for me," said Lady Dulcy; "Jack invented it; Jack has a genius for everything belonging to the road. Now, admire my horses—my twins." The horses were, indeed, an admirable pair, as like as twins, and trotted up hill and down hill as if moved by one spirit. It was a delightful mode of travelling.

"You might see to the ends of the earth in this agreeable fashion, and you can dream of being a nun!" Mary Martha ejaculated, softly.

Lady Dulcy asked if she had any knowledge of what the life of a nun was. M. M.

confessed herself imperfectly informed. She supposed it to consist of fasting and prayers, and of doing what one is bid, no matter how repugnant or difficult.

“It may be all that, and yet as cheerful and tranquil as it is laborious. When I enter the religious life, it will be to labour, in the expectation of finding rest. Now, I want to say a thing to you. Gran'ma tells me that your lot is drawn. You must succeed to Harden Tower, and you must live there. And you will have a great interest in Hardenware. From the moment I saw the crowds of poor about the door of the Sisters' House, it has been borne in upon my mind that I am called to work in Hardenware. But I have a sort of fear that in leaving my place I may lose my identity ; and I dare not contemplate a time when no one will care for me, because no one will know me—who I was. The Sisters of the Poor in Hardenware will take me in—and if you would keep hold of my hand from the outside, and not

forget me, I would try their life. I think—I *think* it might make up to me.”

“I will hold fast by you, trust me!” cried M. M., with her heart in her voice. “I feel what you mean. To find peace you must go out of yourself and be spent for others.”

“Yes. It may be that I have no true vocation. If so, the discipline will not hurt me—it may rest and control me, and give me courage; for, indeed, I am often very unhappy, and all surging in revolt against my bitter fate.”

The way from Castle-Island to Hardenware was along the valley. Mary Martha would remember this drive in the grim March morning, with the livid floods upon the fields and the breeze blowing over the water in a strong ripple. It was not mournful to her; Nature had no mournful aspects for her, but to Lady Dulcy it was a picture of desolation. She gazed at the landscape with eyes as full of sorrow as eyes can be when the soul behind them is not laden with remorse. Yet,

for all that she had lost or resigned, there was nothing to hinder the renewal of her life on another plane ; and with a rare sagacity she had discovered this, and was willing to wait patiently for it ; or, if not always patiently, at least to wait, and prepare herself. Her appeal to the sympathy of Mary Martha, whose lot was drawn to live and die in this place, was an intelligent effort at re-making a life for herself, not without sunshine, in a barren world. She was strong, and strong in many ways.

“ If it were not for pity of gran’ma, I should know what to do, and act at once,” she said after awhile. “ But gran’ma has laid such beautiful plans for us—for *you* and *me*, I mean—how we are to go to London after Easter, and she is to present us at the Birthday Drawing-room in May, and how I am to look happy and be her beauty again. I wish she had not been deceived in the beginning. When I tell her that I shall never marry, she just laughs, and says it is because Cousin Robert did not

please me, and she believes it. I think I could look happy, even to-morrow, if I might put on a sister's brown dress and bonnet and veil, and go out into the streets and courts of Hardenware, to help as they do. It is in those courts I shall gather up the fragments of my life, and not in the Queen's palaces. I have the vision of a saint's devotion before me. I *must* reach a little nearer heaven if I aim high."

"You will rise to ruling the whole community of Sisters on earth. You will come to be Mother Superior," said Mary Martha, enlivening with a touch of humour the pathos of the situation.

Lady Dulcy laughed. "I have always had authority—it comes to me by nature. But I must begin by bearing the yoke. They may make it heavier or lighter, as I can endure it, for they are very wise, the Sisters. I am masterful, but not selfish. I can deny myself. And the reason why I believe in my vocation is that, when I see pain and misery, com-

passion crowds the horror and disgust quite out of me. Jack knows whether I am pitiful and helpful or not. All the power of love that God has put into me yearns to become a living force of helpfulness. Don't you see that I may have a life yet, and even a nobler life than what we call a happy one? Oh, I am glad I have met you. I can speak to you—we shall be friends—friends!"

Mary Martha was not so eager and impulsive of speech, but she, too, felt that she had acquired a possession. This rugged girl had the true soul of goodness in her. M. M. had never doubted but that she would do what her mind was set on,—come out of the world of riches and pleasures, and sorrows without end, and give herself to the life of a professed Sister; not necessarily a life of seclusion, as she presently had the opportunity of remarking.

In approaching the town they overtook a shabby old pony in the shafts of a light-hooded cart, and a Sister driving it with skill and

caution through the intricate tangle of market-day. Another Sister sat by her in charge of shining tall milk-cans and bulging sacks, their errand being to collect waste food at certain hotels and wealthy large houses for the comfort of the sick poor in their infirmary. They were rather weather-beaten and hard-featured women, but cheerful and still young; quite common-place, active, and diligent, going about their business with the simplicity of use and custom, and thankful always for a good spoil.

“Pony has seen better days,” said Lady Dulcy, and looked out and smiled and nodded as her carriage passed where they had pulled up at a charitable house of call.

The Sisters looked after the young great lady, the Sunday visitor to their house, of whom it was already gossiped that her bright (?) way was to end at their door, down in the mire and dirt of the Boundary Walks.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE MURKY TOWN.

“Toil is ours ;
But toil is the lot of man.”—BARRY CORNWALL.

MRS. GRIMSTON'S house, the dower-house, was a rather dismal domain on a dull day ; for if not positively in the smoke of the town, it was very near it. The grass-plot savoured of it, so did the lime-trees, and the cultivation of delicate flowers was long given up. You might find a bunch of Michaelmas daisies or a reedy chrysanthemum in their season, but nothing else or better. The brick walls had been raised a foot or two higher than the original, to shield the green seclusion of what was once orchard and fair garden at the back, acres which builders coveted to set up more of their prim villas ; but the fine old lady's

necessities had not been pressing enough yet to induce her to bargain away her privacy. They kept an eye upon her, however, for there was no predicting the moment when they might become so.

The house belonged to a good period of architecture, but had suffered a fire once, which made havoc of the greater part. When the ruins were removed, it was still adequate to its purposes, and the present occupants spoke of it as a lucky fire ; a house too big for their needs would have been an expensive burden. A man and two maids were Mrs. Grimston's servants, and the house went like a clock. The man dusted the books and china, and rubbed the furniture downstairs, and was butler and footman besides. Things were quiet indoors, and sombrely comfortable by fire and candlelight, when flaws and fadedness and wear and tear were all confused in the tranquil dimness. The place had seldom been inhabited many months at a time until James Grimston wanted a home at Harden-

ware ; but when that came about it was a good reason why his grandmother should finally retire from her gay world and begin to rest, and a reason that she could be truly thankful for, because she was outliving her contemporaries there, and was not very happy in the old haunts surrounded by new faces. So London, Brighton, and Bath knew her no more, and she became a familiar figure at the parish church and in the maze of streets all on the way to it. She was an active woman still, and interested in local and public business on James's account, who but for public business would often have been without interests at all.

It was to this house that Lady Dulcy Carleton's carriage drove up about a quarter before noon. The visitors were looked for, and James himself was at home. He came out to receive the young ladies, and brought Miss Brooke to his mother. Mrs. Grimston took Mary Martha into her arms and kissed her, for her name and family's sake, she said,

and the girl was glad to be so welcomed. Lady Dulcy stayed a minute behind to bid Jack be with the carriage in the Boundary Walks at four o'clock ; then she followed, and as spokeswoman for the two, began to inform Mrs. Grimston of the object of their visit ; for which, by-the-by, the elder lady had been fully prepared. They went to *déjeuner* almost at once, for James had a programme ready which he desired to carry out, and their time would be none too much for it. His mother was to accompany them, and in setting forth she kept Mary Martha to herself committing Lady Dulcy to her son's escort. She wanted to make the girl's acquaintance who pleased James as no girl had pleased him since the quite early, hopeful days of his life. Mary Martha was not a hard study ; she was responsive to kindness ; but when she had a purpose she was apt to let it fill her mind. She was come to see her share in this great, grimy town, and just now her attention was caught and held by the scenes,

and the people about her. She overflowed with pertinent inquiries, which James could answer better than his mother, and the consequence was a rather prompt exchange of partners which seemed gratifying to both.

"Why are you so impatient to get into harness? You dear child! what if you find it heavy and galling?" said he, using a locution that was become so frequent with him that it might be called habitual.

"Don't terrify me! I have not chosen my lot. If it galls and is heavy, I shall remember that it is given me," was the brave reply.

"And you will find somebody stronger than yourself to aid you in bearing it."

"Oh, yes! I never fear but that I shall get along capitally—*capitally!*"

On leaving the dower-house they had turned towards the town. For a considerable distance the pollard limes in wintry leaflessness screened the footway from the broad and crowded main thoroughfare. It was a country footpath within the trees, gravelled

and soft with wet, but as the smoke thickened they came to pavement, half-clean yet, but black and greasy long before they reached the bridge. Across the bridge they were in the Great Mead, in the region of unceasing toil and perpetual poverty. The river was swirling through the arches, and washing with sullen force the base of the buildings on the staithe. In ordinary times people could go that way to church, but now the waters were up to the churchyard wall, and the Four Acres were swamped over a third of their extent. It was a fine day in the fields, but it was very gloomy in Hardenware, and the gas was lit in many of the low little shops in the narrower streets. These were the streets that George Marriott had said it would take a conflagration to purify. Idle people were in them chiefly at this hour. Workpeople were at work, and children in school; but there were a few doleful figures drifting to and fro, pictures of misery, trophies of rags. "Don't look at them," said James

to his young companion. Also there were a few decent old folks, feeling their way, while the way was clear of hurrying strong men and women too intent on business not to go straight forward to it, even though they thrust the feeble aside. It was not a quite novel scene to Mary Martha. The suburb of Blackchester, that they drove through in going from Thornhill, was not to be preferred. If the houses were newer at Blackchester they were a mushroom growth, uglier and shabbier. These old streets on the Great Mead had been built by degrees, by individuals, and of various ranks and patterns. Their decay was that of better days, not of original meanness; and many houses that had stood their century, if they had to come down, would have to be taken down stone by stone and brick by brick. Of these close and crowded quarters enough was seen in simply passing through.

"We are going in the direction of the parish church?" Mary Martha inquired;

and James said, Yes, they were on their way to the Four Acres.

In the Four Acres the builders were busy again, and the walls of the new edifice were rising well above the foundations. Roger Brooke's old house was a warm and comfortable object in the background, and not the less so for the visible glow of a fire in one of the upper rooms. That was where the trustees transacted their business—their board-room; and they were making a finish of it for the day, with a conversation near the window, at the moment Mr. Grimston and Miss Brooke came in view.

"Who's yon?" said Mr. Fynes, breaking off in the middle of a sentence, and gazing into the distance at the intruding figures. Grimston, surely, and Miss Brooke with him? Ha! *hum*." Mr. Marriott pushed his head forward to see too, and Mr. Bingham craned his neck for the same purpose.

James and Mary Martha were alone; the two other ladies had not cared to cross the

wet grass, and were sheltering in the precincts of the church. Without more ado the trustees descended to the garden ; and as they went Mr. Fynes, who had the word when Mr. Grimston and Miss Brooke appeared, continued to deliver himself of a borrowed opinion—to wit : that ridding Hardenware of this plague of waters was a mere question of money ; if the town had the heart to pay for it, the work could be done by any competent engineer. Miss Brooke overheard him. “The trustees holding an open-air meeting,” she remarked with gentle amusement.

Just then the vicar came running out from his luncheon to invite his father-in-law in, and perhaps to take a glance at his beloved new buildings by the way. This fortuitous concourse of atoms gravitated naturally towards the young lady of the future, who announced with a grave pleasantness that she had come to explore the Great Mead, and Mr. Grimston was kind enough to be her guide. Immediately Mr. Fynes was for

introducing to her his scheme for controlling these disastrous floods.

“Sir John Hardy declares it to be quite easily practicable, and recommends to us a pupil of his own, who is almost a townsman of ours, to carry it out,—Mr. George Marriott, I mean. I think you know him, Miss Brooke?”

“Yes. Is he here?” says Mary Martha, and looks quietly round towards George’s father; who says “No,” and is sorry that he is not.

“He could have explained Fynes’ hobby better than Fynes himself,” Mr. Bingham informed her. “In fact, Marriott has gone into it as an engineer, and what he says is that it will have to be done.”

“Assuredly it will have to be done,” Mr. Grimston added in a conclusive manner. “The wonder is that it is still left to do.”

“That is fine talking, Grimston. But trustees of other people’s money cannot be allowed to sink it in non-productive enter-

prises. The embankment of the river will be a benefit and improvement to the lower part of the town, but it will bring no dividend. You cannot put a toll on it, you know." Mr. Marriott was the speaker now, and he spoke in a high dictatorial voice, which caused Mary Martha to speculate whether the feud between their families might not have owed its permanence to hereditary temper. George had a strain of the despot in him too. M. M. had seen it.

The gentlemen stood about talking eagerly and disputatiously for several minutes, and were so occupied with these concerns that Miss Brooke was able to move away unnoticed to the entrance of old Roger's house. She walked into the low stone hall, where there was nothing to see, then up the oak-stairs and in at the first open door, which happened to be that of the room the trustees had just left. The fire was still burning brightly, and one lattice of the window was set back. She advanced to look out, and

was instantly detected. Mr. Marriott shook his head at her, intimating, and even saying, inaudibly to her, that she had no right up there *yet*. Mr. Howe and Mr. Grimston joined her. She was giving herself airs and graces of heiress-ship, and feeling that it might be very pleasant to have it in one's power to do a great deal of good.

"Old Roger Brooke knew how to build a house," the young lady began to say with delightful seriousness. "I like this. If it were not next to the parish church I should propose to give it to Lady Dulcy Carleton's Sisters of the Poor, when they are turned out of their house in the Boundary Walks."

The vicar rushed into her views with a perfect enthusiasm: "You can propose to give it to *my* Sisters, dear Miss Brooke. *They* also are under notice to quit—I don't know where Grimston intends to shelter all the people who will be homeless next August."

"Perhaps he means to hut them in the

fields—it would not be amiss living in tents in August, out on those great sloping meadows near the river, which we passed driving in from Castle-Island.”

“It would be a wholesome change; a refreshing and invigorating variety. I think we *will* hut a few hundreds—we are going to transport a shipload and migrate a trainful, but the exodus will not be on the scale Howe imagines.”

“I have heard you say more than once, Grimston, that half the working-men in Hardenware would still be enough—and *that* means a very large removal.”

“So it does, and it is needed; but it is not to say that it will get itself done.” Mary Martha feared Mr. Grimston was rather harsh, and said, “*Oh!*” in an accent of reproach. “It is not charity that will mend prevalent evils in Hardenware,” he answered to her deprecating looks. “There is a congestion of *hopelessness* in the Great Mead—not to speak of want, vice, and misery.

Nothing can deal effectually with this state of things but energetic commercial enterprise, availing itself of all the help that Government provides."

M. M. suppressed a sigh. This was beyond her depth. She turned to the vicar, and invited some information concerning his Sisters—were they nursing sisters or teaching sisters? There was scarcely any work of succouring the poor that they were not helpful in. This was rather trying to James, but he liked Howe, and would not deprive the good fellow of his opportunity. His own was wasting rapidly; his programme had no chance of fulfilment now. Howe talked much and well, and Miss Brooke became profoundly interested. It is not necessary to recite all that she listened to. James seated himself in the window, and let the clergyman have his say out. What part Mrs. Howe took in the parish; what part the young ladies of the congregation took; how his schools were officered, even where the summer treats were

given, and what was the favourite entertainment at the children's Christmas party—he was rendering an epitome of all as to some Lady Bountiful who had placed her purse at his disposal, and Miss Brooke evidently liked it. Her countenance was most pleased and attentive. James could not help laughing, and begged to remind the Vicar of Hardenware that Miss Brooke was not of his fold; Mr. Westley claimed her for a lamb of his flock.

Mr. Howe took the reminder quite gravely: “Miss Brooke may not be of my fold, Grimston; but I will not resign her as being of my parish when, if life be spared her, she must inherit a third part of it. You saw her lay our foundation-stone out yonder? And she has promised to be present at the opening, whenever that event comes off. I should like to invite her to witness the distribution of the dole next Christmas-eve, but I must not be *too* encroaching. Still it is a delightful service and a pretty sight, a very

pretty sight! and might interest you---" turning to the young lady.

"If all be well, Mr. Howe, it will give me pleasure to come," said she; and then to Mr. Grimston, suddenly and softly—"Where are the others?—they will think we are lost!" But Mr. Howe overheard her—

"Not at all—if you mean Mrs. Grimston and Lady Dulcy Carleton? I left them safe with my wife in her drawing-room; and if Lady Dulcy has tired of that scene, she will have gone off to her beloved Sisters—saintly creatures they are! I trust somebody has remembered to give Mr. Marriott his luncheon."

Miss Brooke moved towards the door by way of intimating that she thought it time to look up those neglected persons; and a few minutes later she also was in Mrs. Howe's drawing-room, where the parish conversation was renewed. Lady Dulcy had gone to the Boundary Walks, and Mr. Marriott had lunched and gone home; and before James

prevailed upon the vicar's wife to let Miss Brooke come away, the afternoon was half spent. Mary Martha however expressed herself as glad to have become friendly with Mr. and Mrs. Howe; and it is possible that the entertainment she had met with was more agreeable to her taste and feelings than that serious tour of inspection which Mr. Grimston had designed for her; and which he said was only deferred, not to be given up. And then he proposed to his mother that the "dear child" should come and stay at the dower house for a few days, when he might be able to secure a chance of introducing her to some of the great workshops and factories which she ought to see. Mrs. Grimston acquiesced with cordiality, and M. M. consented as if she would like it—conditionally on her Uncle Richard's consenting, of which James said he had no doubt.

"The vicar and his wife took possession of you to-day as if you belonged to them. When you come to the dower house, I

shall not let them know you are here," he said, and M. M. laughed with a little mischief in her mind, defying him to hinder it.

They were now taking their way to the Boundary Walks, so called as being the limits of the Great Mead, green lanes once, and still preserving, in the names of street and court and alley, reminiscences of springs and summers long dead and gone. Blossom Street, turning into Orchard Row, where the Sisters of the Poor had their house, could have seen no blossom, no fruit unless in baskets, for many and many a year. Mr. Grimston was well known there, and found willing admission; but as Lady Dulcy had been engaging the Sisters to let Miss Brooke see over their establishment, his mother and he now took leave of the young ladies, with hopes of meeting again shortly.

The Sisters' House was full of ups and downs, and wonderfully clean, with bare

brick and boarded floors, and walls annually subjected to a re-coating of buff distemper. Under the same roof was a *crèche*, an infant school, and a hospital for sick children. The Sisters who worked out of the house as nurses were numerous, and they looked like workers, but without the stress of anxiety. "You see, we have always the Home to return to," one said to Mary Martha who had remarked on their peaceful faces. The life did not attract her, would have daunted her; but Lady Dulcy seemed quite drawn to it.

"I wish I could stay with you," she said to the Mother Superior as they were going.

"You will come back to us?"

"Yes, I shall come back."

On the drive to Castle-Island Lady Dulcy began to ask her friend what she thought. Mary Martha thought she might certainly try it, and said that she would in her place, her mind being set that way. As for going to London and going to Court

when she could take no pleasure in it, that she should call the height of folly—*the height of folly*.

“Then you must help me to persuade gran’ma—really, no one will ever miss me but Jack. I am strange to gran’ma, and rather alarming. She has planned and talked, and she went to Harden Tower to ask for your company with me in town ; but I believe she will be the happier for not having the trouble of us.”

“I could not go to town to be company for you ; I am in mourning yet,” M. M. said. And indeed to go to town and engage in gaieties and amusements while George was in Spain would have been, according to her present views, heartless, *quite heartless*, and she would never have dreamed of such a thing. The mere suggestion of it lowered her spirits, recalling to her that the day after to-morrow George would be gone—positively gone.

CHAPTER V.

CALM WEATHER.

“Often, too,

A little cloud would move across the blue.”—KEATS.

MR. MARRIOTT carried home the news that he had again had the good fortune to meet Miss Brooke, and George exclaimed, Was there ever such luck as his! Then his father told him how she was staying up the valley at Castle-Island, and had ridden out to see the hunt the day before, in the company of Lord Malvern and Mr. Grimston.

“The hounds meet at Crosby Rise to-morrow—I’ll go!” said George. “I did not intend it, but——”

“But you would rather give yourself one more chance of seeing Miss Brooke than spend your last day with your mother?”

“Put yourself in my place, sir.”

"Go, George dear—I give you leave. You can return early," said his mother. And George went.

The morning was much pleasanter than Monday. The sun came out at intervals, and the landscape was vastly beautified. Miss Brooke remarked that the scenery might not have been the same. Lady Dulcy was firmly purposed to join the Sisters, but she did not feel bound to sacrifice a day's hunting which came in her lawful way meanwhile, and Miss Brooke was easily persuaded to ride with her to the bishop's palace at Crosby ; to which an invitation had been sent them both for the occasion. Mr. Brooke had been invited to come too, but not having the will, had sent a message to James Grimston to go in place of him, and take care of Mary Martha. James was nothing loth. He donned his old weather-stained red coat, which his grandmother said he ought to think of renewing, and with the best horse he could hire at a venture, away he rode to Crosby Rise.

Crosby Rise was a convenient place of meeting, and there was a large field. George Marriott was in good time, and spent a restless half-hour, for though the well-known ladies of the hunt appeared one after another there was no Miss Brooke in the company, and what surprised him, there was no Lady Dulcy Carleton either. He began to fear that he was going to have only his ride for his pains; but, like a true sportsman, he resolved to have the best of the sport, if he could not have what on this day he would have preferred—a last look and a last word of his lady-love; and at the signal, he trotted with the foremost along the road which passed the palace gates. The gates were open, and just emerging were the girls from Castle-Island, with Mr. Surtees Bingham and Mr. Grimston, and Jack in attendance. Mary Martha was riding “Lady Beauty” again, and George’s fine colour mounted when he caught sight of her. A flush of the finest spirits came over him. George was quite a

buck of the hunt ; his mother always came out to admire him, and tell him the same thing over again—that he was the picture of his father at his age ; and she had done so this morning, adding, that she hoped that sweet girl would be there to admire him too, and not disappoint him. He was not to be disappointed, nor was she ; for she also was a little hopeful, a little expectant, of what it was possible might happen.

It had never been objected to George Marriott that he was shy. He took the grassy margin of the road to come up with her, and was saying, “ Good morning, Miss Brooke ! ” before she was aware of his presence. But her, “ Good morning, Mr. Marriott,” followed as pat as an echo, friendly and neighbourly, and way was made for him to ride on beside her. Mr. Grimston heard him say that he had seen Mr. Brooke in the village as he passed through, and then he seemed to be communicating information, and giving and receiving messages.

Mary Martha was saying: "You did not come to Castle-island on Monday;" and George was answering: "I had no idea you were there. We missed you at church on Sunday, but the wet weather accounted for it." "And to-morrow you set out on your long journey?" "To-morrow I go to Spain. Don't neglect my mother while I am away. She cannot walk up hill so easily as you can run down." "I will do my best, you may be sure. Yesterday, in Hardenware, I saw your father—perhaps he told you?" George intimated that his father had told him. "And made better friends with Mr. and Mrs. Howe." George was glad of that.

They had come a long way for talk such as this, but it was worth while. First love with the bloom on it is a lovely thing. When they had to separate George rode off with a bounding spirit, and M. M. watched him away with a happy countenance. He rode off with Lady Dulcy, and Mr. Grimston loitered behind with Miss Brooke, who

remonstrated against his waste of good opportunities, and begged him to follow the others. She was to stay at the palace until three o'clock, and then to be driven to Castle-island by Miss Bingham in her pony-carriage. On Friday she hoped to go home again. In these circumstances James thought that after he had seen her safe where she was to rest and shelter, he might as well have a stretch across country, for the enjoyment of which he felt in almost as perfect a humour as George himself.

The next day George Marriott set off on his far travels, starting from Stockleigh Station early in the morning, and leaving a very quiet house behind him. The day after that Mary Martha reappeared at the Tower. "Glad, oh, so glad, to be at home once more!" as she expressed it.

Her Uncle Richard, on his part, was by no means sorry to have her back. He had missed her, indeed, though he had scarcely expected it. "And you feel it like coming

home—really ?” he said, gratified by her joyful looks.

“Yes, *really*. It feels more *home* than any place I have ever known—than Thornhill even. Perhaps it is because I have to think of living and dying here. I suppose, Uncle Richard, there is no other place in the world you care for like this ?”

“None. It is a peculiar attachment a man has for his hereditary home. He is fond of it, and proud of it too. You must never forsake our old nest amongst the rocks.

“I never will, Uncle Richard.”

Mary Martha had to answer next a series of questions on what she had seen and done in her absence. She answered them fully, not forgetting to mention her prejudice against being carried to town in Lady Malvern’s train : to which the reply was that she should do as she pleased about that ; nor to narrate how Mr. George Marriott had appeared at Crosby Rise on Wednesday morning, and they had exchanged a few words. Mr. Brooke

seemed a little contraried at hearing this, but let it pass without remark. Then, after a silence, he recollected, and said: "By-the-by, there are letters waiting for you. I did not send them on because you were to come so soon;" and M. M. went away, impatient to see her letters, which were of consequence, though nothing was lost by the short delay.

The first she opened was from Ann and Jane Sheffield, a joint production to announce prospects of marriage. They were marrying brothers.

"The joyful events are to come off on the same day, the first Tuesday in April. Ann will be Mrs. Thomas and Jane Mrs. William Smith. We make no apology for the name, indeed, we think it euphonious and beautiful, *beautiful!* nor for the fact that we shall be 'in trade'—wholesale, of course. Mother and Elizabeth are coming home to preside at the festivities. We would invite you to assist at the spectacle, which is to take place in London, but we fear you would not get

leave to come. Your love and good wishes will oblige. We beg to enclose our 'business cards,' and are always your cousins to command, Jane and Ann Sheffield."

Mary Martha could hear the two speaking, coolly, deliberately, making fun of their most serious concerns, which they would not manage with the less discretion and valour for that. The same tone pervaded a letter from Mrs. Sheffield, who expressed herself as satisfied with her younger daughters' engagements. "They are doing very well for themselves, so far as we can see at present. The Smiths are a respectable family of rather wide connexions, and there is no want of money amongst them. Ann's residence will be Magnum House, Clapham Common. Jane will have to live in a London Square—Finsbury. Elizabeth is of opinion that she shall stay with her mother; but I shall not live for ever, and she is not too old to change her mind. . . . Your letters go the round, and always put us in good humour. You

seem to be quite in your element, and it makes us happy to think how comfortably life at Harden Tower is turning out for you. . . . Have you seen much of Mr. George Marriott, and is he still going to Spain?"

From these inquiries it will be understood that Mary Martha entrusted no confidences to letters that "went the round."

The next she read was from Mrs. Ockleston, to give warning of their return to England at the beginning of next month. "It seems that everything is to happen at the beginning of next month," said M. M., and continued the perusal. "Mr. Ockleston is in the enjoyment of excellent health, and, indeed, so are we all. Mentone has suited us, and it is probable we may spend next winter here. My dear little Marguerite revels in the delicious climate, and has been frequently out of doors in her donkey-chair. She has made progress in walking too. Kate's happiness increases: she is daily more contented. The

sisters are naturally anxious to see one another, and, not to inconvenience them at the château, we have taken our old apartment at St. Croix for a week. I look forward to it with as much pleasure as my girls. We shall spend ten days in Paris on the journey, and I hope to rest again in London. We are timing ourselves to arrive on the fifth of April. Is there any chance that we may have the pleasure of seeing you? Dear Kate was glad to hear that the name and fame of Mons. de Marcel had reached Uncle Richard at Harden Tower. She says that her husband has not given up hopes of visiting England. You should write to her occasionally; a letter would please her. You have written but once, though copiously then—so she tells me. . . . We shall finally disembark at the Red House on Saxby Green on the ninth.”

When Mr. Brooke went to Mary Martha's sitting-room an hour or two later for his afternoon cup of tea, she inquired if he would

like to hear what her letters were about. He said that he should like to hear whatever she was pleased to communicate, and as there were no secrets, she read them through, with explanations following. Her Uncle Richard remarked that there need be no difficulty in giving her aunts and cousins the meeting in London, which it was pretty plain all of them coveted. They could take Grace and Dekker and go up to the old house on the Thames Embankment, to which he was accustomed to go twice or thrice in the year. A month later—in May—would be pleasanter, he said, and there would be more to see. “Only not my friends,” said Mary Martha. “Only not your friends,” he repeated. “Therefore that settles the matter, and you may regard it as decided.” This was really very good of him, and a great stretch of kindness and self-denial.

Mary Martha's letters in answer to those received were songs of praise and thanksgiving. Words would not contain her glad-

ness. She must leave it to their imaginations. "When I tell you that I have received but *one kiss* since Elizabeth left me at Hardenware Station, you may figure to yourself my state of need." This confession, made to her Aunt Lena, elicited a sigh of sympathy. "Ah, I know—I *know*—the chilling atmosphere of Harden Tower, and am amazed that dear child's affectionate heart and lively spirits support it," she said to Mr. Ockleston, who returned a general remark on the fortunate buoyancy of young people. A similar confession made to Elizabeth herself occasioned more surprise. "After all," she said, "M. M. is lonely, living on the heights, though she would have us believe that she does not feel it much. With her loving disposition, I should have expected her to pine." "She is not pining," said Mrs. Sheffield, "but I am afraid that nice, sensible, pleasant Mr. George Marriott has ceased to think of her." This was Mrs. Ockleston's impression, too, and she also was sorry if it were so. Which shows

how, without designing it, incorrect impressions are made.

The weeks that intervened before the beginning of April were lengthened with more variety of occupation than had preceded Mary Martha's visit to Castle-island. She was invited on two occasions to go down to the dower house, and though her stay on each was for one night only, Mr. Grimston had the opportunity he desired of making her acquainted with the manner of life of the more industrious dwellers in the Great Mead; for he did not suffer any one else to encroach upon his time. He was resigning his inspectorship this quarter, with the avowed purpose of serving and representing Mr. Brooke in the heavy business which the termination of the Brooke's Trust would create, and M. M. was encouraged to look to him for all the information and instruction on that subject she cared to acquire. She was thus enabled to write Katherine de Marcel a letter about it, which enlarged her knowledge without

depressing her expectations. Everything was now visibly tending to the crisis that Katherine, and so many besides Katherine, waited for. Mr. Parry came down with his son, called "Young Parry," a spare and clerkly person of forty, who, when other business required his father's presence in town, remained behind, permanently busy in their client's Hardenware affairs. Constant meetings of the trustees were held in the house in the Four Acres, with Mr. Grimston and young Parry assisting, and Mr. Brooke had to make journeys thither twice and thrice in the week. These excursions tried him so severely that Mary Martha was always sorry to hear that he was going ; but he said it was of necessity : James Grimston could do much for him, but he could not do everything.

Thus the young lady of the future began to gain an experimental knowledge of property as involving hard and continuous labour, and for conscientious proprietors anxious forethought to act for the best, and painful after-

thought whether they are really doing so. It was a distinct relief to her when the month waned to its end, and Dekker and Grace got their orders to prepare for going to London. Mr. Grimston mentioned with a high degree of satisfaction that some matters of primary importance were put in order for settlement, and would be made an end of on Mr. Brooke's return home, clearing the way for a press of smaller business which was still of great cumulative consequence. Mary Martha listened in faith, not understanding details, but only principles; and when she saw how almost sick with weariness her Uncle Richard grew, even in anticipation of his delayed inheritance, she was anything but impatient for the reversion of it. But she remembered George for her comfort, the one stronger than herself chosen to share her lot, who would prevent her ever feeling the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, a too cruel and crushing load. She would have been serenely, superlatively happy in this

confidence, on the eve of seeing her friends, if she might have spoken of it; but her Uncle Richard laid a last charge upon her not to speak to any of them of Mr. George Marriott in the sense of his being her suitor.

"Bear in mind," he said, "that no engagement subsists between you, and that it is never good to have names coupled in idle talk."

"No—*no*," said Mary Martha, acquiescently to the general question, but with a slowness implying that she had reserved opinions on the particular instance.

If Mr. Brooke understood her, he took no notice. Since George Marriott was actually gone to Spain, his own hopes were much encouraged. M. M. was not at all flat; she was busy and cheerful, and expectant of delightful change. She talked of many things, but steered quite clear of George's name. On the other hand, her references to Mr. Grimston were rather frequent, and she was always in good humour when he appeared

at the Tower. If anything would have kept up the old Squire's courage at this exhausting time, favourable signs for James would have done it. Mary Martha never forgot to be kind and considerate, and, seeing that he had enough to bear, she gently avoided what she knew teased him, and did her part in making his friend welcome. She recognized, as everybody did, her Uncle Richard's love of James, and never took the trouble to wonder at it. People mostly do grow fond of those they have benefited, and there were long and generous associations attaching him to James as to no other person. The manner of Mr. Grimston's comings and goings, and the need of his coming, naturally brought them all upon an easy footing together. That M. M. was bidden to seek to him for information further helped, and Mr. Grimston's privilege as her instructor gave him fair opportunities. The "dear child," as he called her in his elder way, was obedient to his voice. If he said "Go," she went; if he said "Come," she

came, and never ventured any sportive humours with him, as she was not afraid to do with even her Uncle Richard sometimes. She was on her best behaviour with Mr. Grimston, who impressed her imagination by the dignity of his character, and was no mirth-maker ever. He on his side approved her gentleness, and esteemed himself as surely on the path of happier fortunes. It was a grievous mistake. M. M.'s entire and absolute prepossession in George Marriott's favour maintained a neutral tract of neighbourly kindness around her for everybody, and James was free of it—one amongst many—to be as much her friend, helper, and teacher as he pleased. It was impossible to feel safer than she did in her total unconsciousness of peril. One morning James left a glove behind him, and did not discover his loss until he was halfway down the zigzag, when it was not worth while to turn back for it. Mary Martha, coming into the study, saw the glove lying on the front of the bookcase, and took

it up. It was a dog-skin glove, nearly new, and kept the shape of his hand.

"Is this your glove, Uncle Richard?" she said, showing it to him, knowing it was not his all the while, just speaking idly.

"No. It is Grimston's."

"I will take care of it, and give it to him when he comes again."

Her Uncle Richard looked at her, but did not speak. She put her own hand into the glove, and laughed at the huge misfit; then straightened it out, and laid it down while she wrote notes, letters, and other daily memoranda on account of the house. When she left the room the old man saw that she had carried the glove off. It was on her writing-table at teatime, and then disappeared from sight, having been laid inside one of the table-drawers that went unlocked, where it is to be supposed she forgot it; for she did not give it back to the owner, who subsequently inquired of Dekker if he could help him to recover his lost property—displaying the odd glove.

"Your other glove, sir? I did see it about; I picked it up off the floor myself," said Dekker, and gazed hither and thither in quest of it. "Maybe the young mistress has taken care of it for you, sir;" he knew she had, for he had seen her holding it on her way upstairs.

Mr. Grimston inquired no further for his missing glove; but that day, walking upon the terrace with Mr. Brooke, he spoke of the "dear child" and her vast miscellaneous prospects down below in the valley; whereupon what was in the two men's minds came out. Mr. Brooke said that nothing would please him better than that James should win her. He gave no intimation that there was already a rival in the field; but said only that she would be some time in knowing her own mind, and he should wish her to have time; adding, perhaps as a concession to conscience, that he should neither thwart nor force her affections. And this was the position of affairs when the move was made to London.

CHAPTER VI.

WHERE WAYS MEET AND PART.

“Oft in my way have I
 Stood still, though but a casual passenger,
 So much I felt the awfulness of life.”

WORDSWORTH.

MR. BROOKE'S London house was at the river-end of one of the old streets running down from the Strand. It was a house of two centuries or more, built of red brick, and the front in two bows from basement to roof. The rooms were lofty, with enriched cornices and fine carved marble chimneys, yellowed with age and atmosphere. A pervading smell of bees'-wax and turpentine gave a wholesome sense of purity and cleanliness about the place to people arriving from the country; and Miss Brooke declared it to be surprisingly agreeable there. The housekeeper took her instantly into favour,

for bees'-wax and turpentine, with elbow-grease, she had all her life accounted the best of polishes to keep a London house sweet and fresh. She applied it indiscriminately to floors, wainscot, and furniture ; and everything, upstairs and down, appeared in good old-fashioned order and repair ; as the young mistress, with an amused, discriminating taste, kindly observed, when the servant in charge hoped, with a curtsey, that she found things comfortable, and as she liked them ?

There are more fashionable quarters in London perhaps, but Mr. Brooke had never been tempted to forsake that which his family had preferred in the previous times. He said to his grand-niece that it was in the centre of the town for all that was best worth seeing, and easily accessible from every part of it. The first morning Mary Martha opened her eyes upon the river, running with millions of silver ripples ; the towers of Westminster filled the distance looking out from one window of her bow ; and Black-

friars Bridge and the crowded wharves and warehouses on the further bank filled the opposite curve. Mr. Grimston had come to London with them, and was to be their guest throughout their stay. He had his Club to go to, and Mr. Brooke had the same; and the arrangement was presumably agreeable to every one of them. It was not least so to Mary Martha, who felt no scruple in availing herself of Mr. Grimston's escort whenever it was offered, which was on all occasions when her Uncle Richard professed himself as not young enough for the same exertion as herself, or indifferent to the spectacle she was eager to see.

James Grimston gave himself up to her sweet service. She liked going with him to the Abbey, and walking through the parks and fine streets, where already great people were congregating in numbers for the gay season. He took her to a beautiful ballad concert, to a grand oratorio, and to a lovely spring flower-show; and when she thanked him

affectionately for being so good as to be troubled with her when there must be a hundred things in London that he would rather see and do, he felt her dear perfections truly charming, and only wished her a little more self-consciousness or vanity, or whatever else it is that helps a woman to discern when a man's heart is set to find out her pleasure, and to do it. M. M. always came in beaming, but James not seldom with a grey face of pain ; for the "dear child," it must be confessed, was mercilessly given to walking in preference to going in hansoms, because she saw more of the streets, and the streets were the best part of the London show. Mr. Brooke was gratified to send them out together, and received them back always in benignant humour, ready to listen to the smallest incidents that they had met with. He very soon began to think within himself that he was wise, and George Marriott's chances were nowhere. But if Mary Martha had never been better amused, she

still wanted, to make her happiness complete, the liberty to write to George and tell him so.

Rules precise and strict were laid down for her association with her other friends whose presence in London was the motive of hers. Indeed, without some such rules they might never have seen each other ; for they all had separate interests, business, and pleasures. The Ocklestons were not yet come ; but Mrs. Sheffield was at the Paddington Hotel with her daughters, from which the double marriage was to be celebrated. The Paddington Hotel was a long way off, and Mr. Brooke bade Mary Martha invite them to luncheon, and keep the afternoon open for them. They all came. It was strange and not lively, meeting thus, and thinking of their last parting at Thornhill ; but they tried not to think of it. Jane pretended to detect the most remarkable transformation in M. M. There were two exquisitely sculptured heads, discoloured like the mantel-pieces, on brackets in corners of the drawing-room, and Jane

averred that the little cousin had taken on a countenance like them : "a lofty, angelic countenance, as of a beatified young princess, who would never wish to visit in Finsbury Square." Then Ann remembered that she had "a puritanical distaste for the conviviality embodied in port-wine, until it was reduced to negus, with plenty of hot water, lemon, and sugar, which would be sheer desecration and wanton misuse of the rare old port that kept afloat the fame and fortunes of Magnum House." These two, Jane and Ann, had cultivated the tone of *persiflage* until it was become their familiar form of conversation. Not one sensible or serious word had they for Mary Martha that afternoon. However, she had seen them, and was glad. Elizabeth and her mother were to come again ; Elizabeth came twice again, because Mr. Brooke did not choose to make it convenient to send his grand-niece to them at their hotel. He was extremely courteous to Mrs. Sheffield ; but M. M. heard now for

the first time that her father's marriage had been displeasing to him, though for no sufficient reason. Thus do items of family intelligence crop out at intervals as some occasion opens them a way, and in this M. M. naturally discovered a cause or an excuse for Mr. Brooke's early neglect of herself.

There was little, if any, of the exuberant joy that Mary Martha had anticipated in this meeting again with her first and dearest and longest friends. They were all, mother and daughters, busy and anxious in their own concerns. M. M. depended upon them no more; they need take no more careful thought about her, and this was a loosening of ties by itself. They had much to tell, and little to hear. They were preoccupied with wedding clothes, marriage settlements, and house furnishing. Mary Martha was a good listener, and had a mind at leisure from herself to give to them. They said to one another that she was quite unspoilt—she never was selfish, and she was as ready as

ever with sympathy. Elizabeth especially found her so. Elizabeth had not a mind at leisure from herself; the "Weathercock" had come to town, and was hovering about the Paddington Hotel.

"One can forgive a great deal to a person one loves," she remarked pensively on the last of her visits to the little cousin.

"Oh, yes! and one is so much happier forgiving," M. M. said, not seeing the application of the remark, but supposing that it would follow, which it did.

"Do you recollect Mr. — who used to come a good deal to Thornhill two summers ago? Papa liked him very much; it was he who bought Thornhill—as I think we told you."

M. M. recollected Mr. — but not too vividly. "Yes, I think I know who you mean. He was tall and dark, not unlike Mr. Grimston?"

"*Tall*, but not *dark*; sandy, rather, You are thinking of Mr. Craigmillar, the hand-

some Scotchman. Mr. —— had a little passing admiration for *you*. Now do you recollect him?"

"So many have had that," said M. M., deprecating reproach with a merry laugh, seeing perfectly to what conclusion Elizabeth's observations tended.

Elizabeth's ideas were diverted for a minute, and she looked at M. M. with a silent eye of inquiry. No information was granted to her silence, but a tell-tale colour rose in the little cousin's face, and then Elizabeth spoke: "If it is not being too curious, I should really like to know whether it has proved a mere passing admiration that your '*Contemporary*' had for you, or you for him."

Now Mary Martha, without meaning harm, had all her life practised a deceptive trick of not answering but sighing when she was posed by a close question; and being under articles to confess nothing concerning George she just lifted her eyebrows, glanced aside at

the river, and half-ruefully smiled and sighed, as if reflecting upon faults that she had been accused of aforetime.

Elizabeth put her own construction on these signs and tokens, and was sorry, and even disposed to find fault. "I am afraid you are fickle and prone to change, M. M. Go the world round, and I don't believe you will find a more manly fellow than George Marriott, though he may not be quite up to the standard measure of rank and wealth at Harden Tower."

"There is an old feud between the two families," M. M. said, with restored tranquillity.

"Old feuds have been pacified before now."

M. M. would have liked to sit at Elizabeth's feet, and pour out all her beautiful story; but she was forbidden, she did not dare; and after waiting with a little tender expectancy for the confidences that did not flow, Elizabeth reverted to her own affairs. But when she was finally going away, M. M.

came petting about her as in childish days, laying her head against Elizabeth's shoulder, and pouting her mouth to be kissed.

"As much a baby as ever, M. M.," said her elder cousin, complying with her wish to be caressed. "There is something you want to tell me—and you are afraid. Then, keep it to yourself."

"I have to obey Uncle Richard now, and he hates and dreads gossip," was M. M.'s plea.

"Gossip is hateful. But nothing between us and mother ought to be thought of as gossip. Mother is rather sorry about Mr. George Marriott."

"Tell her not to be sorry! She need not be sorry!" M. M. cried eagerly; "I am happy enough!"

"Very good—I will not press you. But as to being happy enough, if that dry chip of an old man is all you have to spend your affection on, I pity you!" And Elizabeth went away sorely perplexed.

Mr. and Mrs. Ockleston and Marguerite had arrived in London only the day before the Sheffields left, and had taken up their rest at an hotel near Mr. Brooke's house, partly for the convenience of seeing the most of Mary Martha. But it turned out with them, as with the others, that they had too many and absorbing occupations claiming them in other quarters to have much time to devote to her. M. M. noticed that her Aunt Lena especially, while facing her, and seeming to hear her little small-talk, was often thinking of something else. Marguerite declared London altogether a mistake as a place for seeing one's friends, and said Mary Martha must come to Saxby, or they must come to Harden Tower. Mr. Brooke called upon Mr. Ockleston, and there was a formal meeting with Mrs. Ockleston and Marguerite on another occasion ; but her Aunt Lena said to Mary Martha after, that she could "never forget." It was sufficient, however, to be called a reconciliation, and to permit the

giving and accepting of an invitation to dinner, when Mrs. Ockleston's memories were a little further appeased by Mr. Brooke's complimentary references to her elder daughter's marriage, and still more by his saying that if it would be agreeable to Mons. de Marcel he should be happy to lend him his house in London for a few weeks in the summer. She was sure that Mons. de Marcel would be glad to avail himself of the kind offer, and Katherine also.

"And while they are in England I hope they will come into Harden, and make friends with my grand-niece in her own home," said the old Squire, endeavouring to fulfil his duty to the young generation before vacating his place as head of the family. "And you, too," he added; but to this Mrs. Ockleston gently shook her head. "Then I must leave Mary Martha to persuade you."

Mr. Grimston was at the re-union of course. "A great gentleman," Mr. Ockle-

ston remarked to his wife on their way back to their inn, and wanted to know his position in the house. In his own judgment Mr. Ockleston had already divined it. His wife had done the same, but she took the first occasion to ask M. M. how Mr. Grimston came to be so closely and intimately associated with Mr. Brooke. M. M. was enthusiastic in his praises. "He is good—a perfect hero!" said she, and much more. By dint of pertinent questions her Aunt Lena learnt how he had been all but a son to Mr. Brooke, and was now giving him every possible aid towards the re-settlement of the Hardenware property when the old Trust lapsed. M. M. said that she did not know how her Uncle Richard would get on but for Mr. Grimston; the work was very heavy, and though there were the lawyers and the trustees and other people busy besides in his affairs, it was always to Mr. Grimston he looked to help him and clear his way.

“And Mr. George Marriott is in Spain?” Mrs. Ockleston said, reflecting.

“Yes,” said M. M. gently, and sighed.

Her Aunt Lena gave a moment’s compassion to the girl. She was fearing that Mr. Grimston might become a *supplanter*; but spoke not a word of it. And on the appointed day Mr. Ockleston took his wife and Marguerite down to their new home on Saxby Green.

Mr. Brooke then began immediately to suppose that Mary Martha must be eager to return into the country—which signified that he was; and M. M. making no demur, they all travelled to Harden together. They had been away barely a fortnight, but M. M. felt it like an age, in events and experience. It had taught her that time is no gauge of space. When she was a schoolgirl she would come back for her holidays to Thornhill, as if she had gone only yesterday, but there was no more sentiment of “only yesterday” between herself and her Thornhill cousins now. They

had each and all turned into a different road, and must choose fresh company. It was something like that, too, with her Aunt Lena.

These discoveries made her thoughtful, and gave her thoughts a tinge of melancholy. No one came running up to the Tower next morning to show her how pleased they were to hear that she was at home again. Her return was without a welcome. Already life was bidding her drop some of her precious things and loose hands with some of her dearest friends. At the same time her gifts were being increased from other sources, and other hands were being stretched out to clasp hers. The winter was over and gone, the period of growth, within and without, was come, and soon she was bestirring herself, looking forward to blossom time, and the fruit-bearing season beyond it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUNG SQUIRESS.

“Praise, they that will, times past ; I joy to see
Myself now live ; this age best pleaseth me.”

HERRICK.

AND now came on the beauty of Spring in country-places, of woods and meadows bedecked by the dewy fingers of April and the bountiful graces of May. Harden was rich in wild flowers, lovelier in their natural simple profusion than the most laboured gardens. On half-holidays the children poured out from the town, and spread themselves over the fields where cowslips grew, and primroses twinkled in the shadow of hedgerows and wayside trees. The yellow cowslip is the children's treasure of gold and sweetness. Miss Brooke fell in with the little people in her walks continually, and was a good customer

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to them. She adorned her own sitting-room with primroses, and sent baskets of bunches in the bud half-open to Mrs. Grimston and Mrs. Howe, because primroses have a cool freshness of scent, and are more like sunshine in gloomy town parlours than any other flower except daffodils, and daffodils do not grow wild in Harden. And other baskets found their way to the Sisters in the Boundary Walks. Mary Martha was cultivating the kind little charities of life. She had plenty of leisure to practise her music and other things since she was exempted from the dull task of copying papers, and when her Uncle Richard had to spend a day in Hardenware, she found herself in possession of many long and solitary hours.

One morning it happened that he left directly after breakfast, and she mounted into the back seat of the old basket carriage to be taken as far as the gate at the bend of the road where it turned downhill, for the pleasure of walking back through the woods.

The primroses were later in the wood than in the field, and not being gathered by the ranging troops of children, were shining all over the rugged and mossy knolls. M. M. selected the finest buds that were ready to blow, and filled her prettiest basket—this was her object in driving along the road to walk back through the woods. Mrs. Howe, returning thanks for hers, had said, “Mother will miss her primrose bowls this Spring—she has no Dolly to gather them now;” and M. M. had instantly determined that she would replace Dolly in this instance, and not let George’s mother miss her primrose bowls.

Mary Martha had leave now to go to the village, taking Grace with her; to visit the school, and a few poor people and neighbours of whom she wished to make friends. Mr. Brooke had found it tiresome to go with her everywhere, and it was impossible to keep her so close to the house when Spring and fine weather came on as he had done in winter and snow-time. By degrees her

privileges were being increased, and her leading strings lengthened—not dropt by any means ; she still had to ask permission when she wanted to do any unaccustomed thing, and did not find it invariably accorded. She would not, however, ask permission to carry her basket of primroses to Mrs. Marriott—she thought it better not to risk a refusal ; and with Grace in attendance, she set off shortly after luncheon. She had never been to the Manor to call except on that one occasion with her Uncle Richard when Mrs. Marriott was away from home, and she went now with a little trepidation, as not quite sure how it might be taken. George’s mother had called upon her a week ago when she came back from London, and this was intended as a return visit.

By the greatest good luck, as she thought it, Mrs. Marriott was alone ; Mr. Marriott had gone to the council of trustees to which Mr. Brooke had gone, and they had a most happy meeting. The bowls that were

appropriated to primroses when there were girls at home to supply them were brought out from their cupboard, and filled by M. M. herself, George's mother looking on, and thinking how nice it was of her, and how she should write and tell George about it, dear boy! She felt the warmest, tenderest sympathy for this sweet girl who loved him, but in words she was reserved, and careful of what she said. Mary Martha heard that George was in fine health and temper, hard-worked and tanned so brown that they would disown him at Stockleigh, where his fair skin was reckoned a beauty, but she heard little more. Mrs. Marriott informed her of her other sons, where they were, and what they were doing, and about her daughters, how comfortably they were married. And she went into the garden to show her the banksia roses in flower at the end of the visit, and refilled her basket with their delicate clusters of yellow and white.

To make banksia roses prosper needs some

contrivance to shelter them from the rasping east winds of May, and George had devised light ornamental wire screens which answered the purpose completely. Many other aids to horticulture he had planned and seen constructed, and every one was a success. Mrs. Marriott said that her flowers were her great amusement, and whenever she wanted any new beds or borders laying out or re-planting, she appealed to George, who understood things so well, and had such good taste.

“I should like George to make me a garden. We have nothing worth calling a garden at the Tower,” Mary Martha said, carried away by the interest of the moment, and revealing with innocent thoughtlessness how much George stood for in her hopes and prospects.

“Oh, you must have a garden! A garden is our chief resource in the country,” his mother replied, not seeming to notice—but she did notice, and told him.

At the gate she kissed Miss Brooke, and

sent her away peaceful and happy. She had not burdened her own maternal conscience with any matter that could vex or reproach her if the past of these two dear young people was past indeed. She had never been sanguine in her son's cause, and she was not hopeful now. Mary Martha's coming with the primroses had pleased and gratified her for George's sake. "She truly cares for him," his mother said ; but the girl's manners were so gentle, simple and unpretending that they made her stronger qualities to be unsuspected. Helen Carter, who was more at the Tower than anyone else in Stockleigh, liked her much, praised her intelligence and her goodness of heart ; but laughed at her humility and obedience to that stingy, tyrannical old Squire : " Who gives her board and lodging, but no other thing that I hear of. And she is nearly as submissive to Mr. Grimston—it seems to me that she has no will of her own where anyone else's comes in," Helen said.

Helen was a clever young person, and when Mrs. Marriott heard her speak thus of Miss Brooke, she was wounded for her son. The trustees had a beginning of suspicion of what Mr. Brooke intended, since the visit to London with his grandniece and Mr. Grimston. Mrs. Marriott had reflected a good deal on the advisability of giving George a warning of it ; but his father had said, ‘ No ; let him get on with his work, and be as gay and hopeful as it was his nature to be ; if it was his fate to be cut out by Grimston of the lady’s fortune and the lady too, to be mad about it beforehand would only spoil his life in Spain, which he was enjoying, and would not lessen the catastrophe if it fell : it was always to be remembered that there was an *if* in the case, and the lady herself its least known quantity.

Mary Martha, quite unwitting of these plans, speculations and opinions that were adverse to her, walked back through the village with a quiet heart, carrying her basket

overflowing with banksia roses. Everyone she met knew by those roses where she had been. She was glad of what she had done, and in her new wisdom of filling up again the empty places of lost company, she thought how she would try to know her neighbours better, and to begin with Miss Westley, who, as the rector's daughter, had a claim upon the young squiress. It would not do, M. M. told herself, to be fastidious and difficult to please. The opportunity was given her of putting her good intentions in practice speedily, for Zoe came out of the general shop, which was also the post-office, and joined her sociably as she passed.

"Those came from the Manor," said she, with a nod towards the lovely roses.

"Your garden is famous for roses too. Are your banksias as forward as these?" M. M. responded pleasantly.

"Our garden must have been famous for roses once, because we are constantly reminded of it ; but papa does not care for the

garden, except for the boys to play in ; and poor mamma is too much harassed with servants and shortness of money to take any interest in flowers."

"Then I hope that you give her all the help you can?" said M. M. who knew a little what that meant.

"Yes. I do a great deal in the house—it would soon come to a dead-lock if I did not ; and my needle is never out of my hand when I am sat down."

Mary Martha had a fit of penitence at hearing these statements, and proposed sharing her roses with Zoe. Zoe declined to accept more than one spray : "There is a glass on the drawing-room table that holds a single flower, and that I can keep filled. It is really too much trouble to do more. We have roses trained on the house-walls, and some have grown wild amongst the shrubs ; but our 'odd man' has enough to do without bothering about flowers. The lawn does for tennis. Stockleigh is very dull—don't you find it so, Miss Brooke?"

"No. It is close at home, and I should not think of finding it dull. Besides, I am beginning to know a few people well enough to like them. As I shall have to live and die at the Tower probably, it would be very unwise to give way to thinking it dull here."

Miss Westley looked at the young squiress more attentively : "Will you come and play tennis with us ? We play nearly every day. You could seldom drop in amiss between three and five," she said. They were approaching the rectory gate.

"I will come now and then. You must not look upon me as a regular player."

"No. You have many engagements ; but it would be nice if you would come now and then, as you say. Will you come and see mamma now ? She will be very glad. She says that she never sees you except in church." M. M. consented, and Zoe conducted her through the old house to the drawing-room with its long windows opening to the ground. "Mamma, I have brought

you Miss Brooke," she announced ; and Mrs. Westley rose and came forward, a well dressed, nice looking, rather stout lady of diffident manners. The rector's wife seemed indeed so shy that her visitor was struck shy too. But that soon passed off ; the roses were spoken of again, and the family at the Manor mentioned, when Zoe, with an irrepressible impulse of nature, said to Mary Martha in a confidential voice : " You and Mr. George Marriott were such friends in the snow-time that I really believed it was ' a case ' between you ! "

Mary Martha showed her little white teeth in a smile of amusement, and cried out softly but impressively : " *No !* did you ? "

" But I suppose that I was mistaken ? " says Zoe.

" You jump to too hasty conclusions," rejoins M. M., and leaves the familiar young lady puzzling as to what she means.

Mrs. Westley was abashed by her daughter's forwardness ; but Miss Brooke

showed no offence, only taking another line of conversation which led by a short cut into the thick of Mrs. Westley's domestic worries. Mary Martha had a practical understanding of genteel poverty, and was so genuinely sympathetic that the poor overtasked lady, who held in her fingers a bit of embroidery, asked what she thought.

"What do you think, Miss Brooke? My husband had been a curate so many years before he got Stockleigh that the ease and comfort of being his own rector feels like heaven. It is I who suffer the drawbacks. He never troubles about anything. He is like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. What he shall eat and wherewithal he shall be clothed he leaves to me; and as I am not Divine Providence my labour and sorrow to do it are unceasing."

"If you did not tell me so I should never guess it," Miss Brooke said rather wondering, and then she looked with interest about the pretty room where her Aunt Lena and her

own father had been children, and which bore none of the signs of need she recollected at Hoggstock in Mr. Crawley's time, or in poor Mrs. Amos Barton's parlour. "Mr. Westley minds the parish and his pupils—perhaps it is a fair division of labour," she went on, for she was a sympathizer who did not think that it was always the best sort of encouragement to chime in with complaints.

"I never wished to come to Stockleigh myself, where we have not the means to make ourselves acceptable. But Mr. Westley has his ambitions; here we are, and here he intends that we shall stay, unless an opening for his gift as a preacher turns up somewhere that would suit us better. It is a nice house for pupils, and the rector of Stockleigh has a name that he is somebody, which attracts pupils. But Mr. Westley cannot go on another winter without a curate, and how his stipend is to be raised I do not know."

As Miss Brooke did not know either she judiciously held her tongue for a minute, and then remarked that her grandfather had been Rector of Stockleigh and had lived in that house, but whether he had a curate or not she could not say. And presently after she took her leave, and Zoe walked with her to the lodge at the foot of the new road.

Mary Martha felt that she had accomplished social and neighbourly duties that afternoon, and that she had a good account to give of herself to her Uncle Richard when he came home. He was too weary to listen to her at once, but in the evening, after dinner, he heard her story. To the primrose visit and the banksia roses he said nothing, but to Mrs. Westley's trials and difficulties he said: "*Hum,*" and told M. M. to talk to Mrs. Carter about that. Her heart had been touched, and she was for devising means to provide a curate's stipend, which the Squire did not see his way to doing. His opinion was that Westley gave as little

for his pay as a man could do, and in any profession but the Church he would have to work a great deal harder for it: "Two services on Sunday and the church shut all the rest of the week. Carter gave a Wednesday evening service which the people liked, but Westley has dropped it, and every other duty that is not obligatory upon him. The fact is, Westley does not love work." Mr. Brooke checked himself. He was old-fashioned enough to respect Mr. Westley's office, if he did not much admire the Rector himself.

Mary Martha had expressed herself on some former occasion as being desirous of doing what is right, and as Mrs. Westley had appealed to her in her position as "Miss Brooke," she did not let her appeal fall at once to the ground. She talked to Mrs. Carter, as her Uncle Richard advised.

"The Westleys are *delighted* to be at Stockleigh—do they look as if they were

sorry?" Mrs. Carter said, with her uncompromising plainness. "Stockleigh is where Mr. Westley always wanted to be. He wanted the position, and the rectory-house, the best within ten miles round Hardenware. No rector could afford to live in it who had not private property, unless he took pupils. Mr. Westley finds Stockleigh the very place for him. Whether he is the very man for the place is an open question. Some of us think not; but he is indifferent to what we think. And there is really nothing against him. He is a change from his predecessors, that is all; and as I do not believe he has the smallest intention of going away, we shall grow accustomed to him after a year or two. We really might be much worse off. He is dreadfully Low Church, and not fond of Church work, except preaching, for which he is supposed by some people to have a gift; as for the Wednesday evening service, which he dropped, my husband used to say that it might easily have been better attended. If they did not

make such a wailing over their poverty, we should suppose them to be in really comfortable circumstances."

Miss Brooke confessed that she had not been shocked by any obtrusive signs of poverty.

"They are *not* poor, my dear; or, if they are, it is with the poverty of nine-tenths of the world. We could all do with more than we have. Mrs. Westley has money of her own, and his pupils pay a hundred a year; he has half a dozen of them. The living, including the house, is worth from two hundred and seventy to three hundred a year. There was no offertory, except on Communion Sundays, for the poor, in Mr. Carter's time; now we have it at every service, and the Rector takes Communion Sunday. I don't know any more than Mrs. Westley does where a curate's stipend is to come from. My husband paid his curate out of his own stipend, and he was always some elderly or overworked clergyman from London or out

of Hardenware who wanted rest and country diet. There is not work for a vigorous young curate at Stockleigh, unless the Rector means him to work in his school. My boys read the Lessons for him when they are home from Oxford. He puts all his strength into his sermons, his wife says, pitying him. My dear, don't you pity either of them; don't trouble yourself with their troubles; they would not be less if they had twice the money, for money is not the root of the matter. Mr. Westley cannot be to society what your grandfather and my dear husband were; for though a clergyman has the *status* of a gentleman, he is a man for a' that; and men differ."

Mary Martha could only let the curate's stipend be as if she had not heard of it; but having put her hand to the parish plough, she was disinclined to look back. She really wanted to be brought in feeling contact with her less fortunate fellow-creatures, and to do her duty in the station of life to which

it had pleased God to call her. The next time she had any intimate conversation with Mrs. Westley, that poor lady was in distress about the Sunday School children's Midsummer treat; where it was to be, and how the expense was to be met. M. M. did not commit herself, but in the evening she asked her Uncle Richard if she might give the treat, and give it in the Esterling Woods. He paused upon the request for a minute, as if scarcely understanding what she meant; but when she explained that it was only a village children's tea out-of-doors, he remembered, and said quite pleasantly: "Yes, yes, I see no objection—do it, if you like."

"The children will walk there; Oke will let us boil the kettle, and cook will make us any quantity of buns. I'll invite the company. You'll come, Uncle Richard, and give the prizes to boys who run races: the boy who is last is the winner of one race, but we don't tell *which* till it is over. That's like life. Mr. Grimston shall come, if you insist upon it."

“ I’ll come for ten minutes, if I must ; but let Grimston off. I don’t believe he cares for school feasts.”

“ I should like to ask Lady Dulcy Carleton—may I ?”

“ Do as you please.”

Mary Martha was charmed with this cordial assent to her wishes, and lightened Mrs. Westley’s heart immensely by the communication of it. Preparing for this event, and looking forward to it, was a great thing for her—greater even than for the children. She took counsel with the school-teachers, and had to go down to Hardenware to buy the prizes and presents that are expected at a treat, and Mrs. Howe was so kind as to help her in choosing them. M. M. was much concerned to do her entertaining as it ought to be done, and was glad of advice and assistance from Mrs. Howe. Miss Westley had offered hers, but as Grace went to be useful at the shops, there was no room for Zoe in the basket-carriage. M. M.

felt, for the first time, like handselling the honours and powers of a young squire. The shopkeepers were deeply interested to please her with their wares, and profoundly respectful in their manners. Masters waited upon her themselves, and more than one remarked that the young lady had good sense, and knew how to lay out money to the best advantage. Mr. Brooke had, in fact, given her none to waste, and she was careful accordingly.

CHAPTER VIII.

KATHERINE AT HARDEN TOWER.

"When all birds else do of their music fail,
Money's the still sweet-singing nightingale."

HERRICK.

LADY DULCY CARLETON wrote Miss Brooke a letter at this time. She was still at Castle-island, but alone there. Lord and Lady Malvern were at another of their country-houses on the road to London. The purport of the letter was business. Lady Dulcy wanted to sell her carriage and the twins, and if possible to get Jack taken into the bargain. She remembered that Miss Brooke had approved her equipage ; her own use for it was over, and she wrote to suggest that Mr. Brooke should buy it for her.

Mr. Grimston happened to be at the Tower the morning the letter came, and they

were all at breakfast. Mary Martha coloured as she read the frank and friendly proposal, alarmed at the idea of mentioning it to her Uncle Richard, who had never made any sign of giving her more than half the back-seat in the old basket-carriage. Reading on, she learnt that Lady Dulcy had gained the requisite permission to enter the religious life with much less difficulty than she had anticipated. She had been compelled to render her reason for her wish to retire from the great world, and *they* had seen the wisdom of it. She had been permitted to devote a sum of money to the purchase of two of the houses in Branksome Street, to which the Sisters were in course of removing; and as soon as they were settled in their new quarters, she was to join them.

Mary Martha's eyes dwelt thoughtfully on the signature.

"A serious communication?" said her Uncle Richard, who was always observant of her, and more regardful now.

"Yes, indeed! Lady Dulcy Carleton is giving up hunting and the pleasures of a wild Irish heiress, to join the Sisters of the Poor in Hardenware."

"What martyrs some women are pleased to make of themselves!"

James Grimston asked if Lady Dulcy made any allusion to her carriage and horses, and M. M. said "Yes; she wants to sell them, and Jack too."

"Then see about it, James, will you?" said Mr. Brooke; and from further remarks, M. M. learnt that the purchase was already under consideration.

Two days later Jack arrived from Castle-island with the twins. The carriage was left at Hardenware to have the armorial bearings changed, and when it was brought home to the Tower, Mr. Brooke presented it to his grand-niece.

"There's your carriage. It will serve until you can buy a finer of your own choice."

"I shall never desire a finer, Uncle

Richard. A 'pony shay' was the top of my ambition!" The young squiress was, however, highly delighted, to be provided for so far beyond her ambition ; though she was rather shy at first of using her carriage, and did not begin to enjoy it until her Uncle Richard was prevailed on to give up the shabby old basket-trap, and claim his share of its superior comfort.

Jack took to his new mistress with a dumb resignation which betrayed his grieving for her he had lost. Miss Brooke was a quiet young lady, and always kindly spoken to servants ; but Jack was Irish, and would never be devoted to her as he was to the foster-child of his wife who was dead.

Mr. Grimston said Miss Brooke was lucky in falling in with a groom who had all the best qualities of his class, and Jack took his place with general favour and acceptance at the Tower. Mary Martha had now two servants of her own, but her honours came so much by degrees that she never felt other-

wise than that she was born to them. The thing that was ever most strange to her was the personal deference which grew with steady increase as she put on the trappings of her rank, and was surrounded by the pomp and circumstance of fortune. She did not acquire relish for that, but she did like to know herself tenderly respected and beloved, and had no occasion to be less than happy in the tribute of affection that she was winning. She was happy; the world was very bright and fair to her. Her lot appeared enviable at this moment, and the burden of it was unfelt yet.

It happened, as Mary Martha thought, most opportunely, that Mons. de Marcel and Katherine arrived in London at the beginning of June, and after a fortnight of Mr. Brooke's old house by the river and the sights of the town, were quite ready to come into the country. They were to come to Harden first, but for two days only, M. M. being extremely desirous of having Katherine

at the children's treat, and afterwards to go to Saxby; perhaps returning to the Tower for a longer visit on their way back. As soon as it was arranged that the De Marcells would be there, Mary Martha said to Mr. Grimston, "Come to my *al fresco* entertainment in Esterling Wood. It is *my* treat, and I want you to see my cousin Kate. *Do* come." He was only waiting to be asked, and he promised not to fail her.

The De Marcells reached Hardenware on the day and hour appointed, and came on to Stockleigh Station, where Mary Martha met them. Katherine looked extraordinarily handsome, and sounded full of affectionate impatience and curiosity to be made acquainted with Harden, and to see the Tower of which one day her simple, unaffected little cousin must be mistress. "How I envy you!" said she with an energetic embrace; her envy of the moment being directed to the twins, and the carriage she was invited to enter.

Mons. de Marcel observed a benevolent neutrality, and was probably wishing himself on the way to Normandy rather than to the English provinces. "Your rich Hardenware, it is horrible," Kate said with a gesture of repugnance, echoing his previously expressed opinion. "Those places where the money is made should be exiled to another planet; and these pretty green Midsummer fields left free and fresh for our pleasure. The taint of smoke is even here! I smell it; I taste it!"

"No, Kate, surely no!" M. M. expostulated, for the credit of her country.

"But it is so. Charles, am I not right?" the young wife demanded with confident appeal.

"If his dear Katherine tasted the smoke and smelt it, then it was there, no doubt," Mons. de Marcel politely agreed.

They approached the first house of the village, and Kate asked what house that was—so charmingly built, but too open to the road.

"It is Stockleigh Manor House, and belongs to the Marriotts," M. M. told her. "They built so a hundred years ago. They liked to see people go by."

"Ah, ah! I have heard mamma speak of one Mr. George Marriott. And he is the Squire, and lives at the Manor House?"

"No, Kate, his father is the Squire. Mr. George Marriott is in Spain, railway-making. That is his profession, a civil engineer."

"Oh, a civil engineer? And these pretty little houses all in a bower of trees and flowers—who live here? Your little rural society, that one is so well informed of in stories? Your doctor, your curate, your sentimental old maids?"

M. M. said it was so.

In the low evening light the village was picturesque, tranquil, cheerful with the inhabitants standing about after the day's work. Mons. de Marcel called it a *pays charmant*, and Katherine said that mamma had failed to tell her how sweet it was.

Then came the rectory and the church, fallen into sunset shadows, a scene which Katherine recognized from often hearing of it. "Oh, Charles, the home of my mother!" cried she.

Mons. de Marcel found it a peaceable abode, and judged that the whole region must be a favoured haunt of birds.

"Yes," said Mary Martha, who was a true lover of the singing-birds and the familiar denizens of the eaves; "we have not the nightingale so far north, but the thrush and blackbird, and all their tuneful tribe are numerous, and make us delicious concerts. And the swallows and martins—you must see them early in the morning to know their beauty; how they flit and circle about the Tower. It seems that there are thousands when they come all home towards nightfall. They are everywhere—under the eaves, in the chimneys, behind the buttresses, in every nook and cranny of the old stones. They must have built in the place for ages—ever

since it was built itself. What histories they might tell us, Kate, if they could talk."

Passing between the tall ranks of pines up the zigzag, the air was loaded with warm aromatic scents. Mons. de Marcel looked about him, and was quick to observe many little objects above and below that excited his curiosity. Once, as some swift creature slipped over the brown mould under the trees, he would have stopped the carriage to begin hunting there and then had Jack understood his sudden vehement call in his own tongue. But the twins trotted steadily on, and the ardent naturalist sank back into his corner disappointed, lamenting his lost chance of perhaps a discovery and a treasure. Kate was glad. *Now*, she said, and *here* he would evidently find what would amuse him; and then she explained to M. M. that her dear Charles had very little speaking English, and had not, perhaps, been so well amused in London as he had looked forward to being; but, in truth, she added,

Charles was nowhere so well amused as at the château in the company of his family and his beloved creatures. M. M. bethought her on this to inquire for dear old Diogenes and Fanchon, that shivery little pet. Katherine spoke of them with greater patience than formerly, with even a tenderness; dear old Diogenes had ended an honourable life, and was lying under a stone in the grounds, and Fanchon, she said, was a pathetic nice little beast enough when you had learnt her tricks. Mons. de Marcel listened and perhaps recalled another short colloquy between the cousins. Kate was a successful example of the art with which he subdued wild creatures to his hand, and taught them to love their master; and a pleasing instance of the axiom that a young wife is very much what her husband chooses to make her.

Katherine felt much more nervous excitement in coming to Harden Tower than Mary Martha had done under similar circumstances, but Mr. Brooke's utter composure

and serious dignity in receiving his unknown guests and relatives soon restored her balance. Mons. de Marcel was too much the naturalist and travelled gentleman to experience any mental shock or disturbance under less provocation than the escape of a strange reptile that he had espied and was meaning to catch ; and as Mr. Brooke had conversible French enough, they were friends on the spot. When Mons. de Marcel entered the long drawing-room with his orders on, and his handsome, stately young wife by the hand, the other guests of the evening, Mr. Grimston and Miss Carter, were struck by their air and aspect, as by two quite fresh and original people. Mons. de Marcel might be ugly, but he had a noble head and a good countenance, and Katherine, in the simple white dress that she wore when she was married, and the ornaments which were her cousin's gift, looked not ill-mated. The disparity of years between them challenged no remark, and was not even thought of.

The old Squire said to himself that this new grand-niece of his was no Brooke, but she was a magnificent young woman; and with the big bunch of roses she held, and her rich eastern fan hanging to her gold embroidered girdle, would make a splendid picture. Mary Martha, in white too, and her pink coral ornaments, had no pretensions to eclipse or rival Katherine, but she possessed a grace and distinction of her own, which James Grimston admired infinitely more—indeed, James had long looked on her as perfect, the one only woman in the world for him. Helen Carter did not know which to prefer for beauty, for Miss Brooke came out surprisingly when animated, but before the end of the evening she awarded the palm of loveliness to the young squiress, who was enchantingly lovely in happy moments like the present. But what was of perhaps more durable consequence, her Uncle Richard was quite satisfied with the grand-niece who belonged to him, and took a quiet

opportunity of saying so: "I am quite satisfied with my own good little M. M., and don't want to change her for the other." To which she answered: "That is very nice of you; but you must be *nice* to her too." And by this time it had been conveyed to Mr. Brooke what being "*nice*" to Katherine signified in Katherine's mind.

It is to be supposed that the gentlemen spent an agreeable evening, for they made it a long one. They had all seen many countries, and James had seen the least civilized parts of several, which brought his adventures at various points in contact with the experience of Mons. de Marcel. Dekker took them coffee into the dining-room, and afterwards supplied the ladies with tea, casually remarking that the gentlemen had not moved yet. The piano had been set in the long drawing-room for the summer, and Mary Martha played a tune to warn her Uncle Richard that time was passing. But neither did this bring him nor interrupt the

symposium downstairs. At ten Miss Carter went home. Then the cousins changed their place for Mary Martha's sitting-room, which had the beauty of the moonlight to lighten it, and Katherine revived the one subject which had possessed her mind from the beginning of her knowledge of M. M.

How were going the affairs of the old Trust? She understood that August would see the end of it, and their great-uncle Richard enriched beyond the dreams of avarice?

Mary Martha shook her head, emphatically denying this.

"But will he not reap immense accumulated sums of money?" Kate asked with pressing anxiety.

"I do not know that he will," M. M. said. "An immense accumulated heap of dreadful old houses will fall to him, enough to crush him with the labour they create, and will cost money to clear away. Then the ground will be let for new buildings. One part of the

ground is already given away to the town—the river shore—and there will be a rate levied to embank it, and take precautions against the floods they have every winter. And an enclosure, called the Four Acres, next the parish church, has been made over to the vicar, to be kept as a recreation ground. When I have told you this, I have told you all that I know with certainty.”

Katherine had never been able to make Mons. de Marce a sharer in her expectations from Mr. Brooke. He was not a man who would defer any joy of life waiting for dead men's shoes; but Kate had not foregone her dream of rebuilding the old château, and perhaps she cherished it the more dearly for having grown fond of the place herself. To rebuild it, she had thought, would be a wise and just use to put some of that hoarded money to, which she magnified on its way to her Uncle Richard's exchequer; Mary Martha, infected by her enthusiasm, would have rejoiced to promote such a generous

movement on his part. But speaking candidly, she did not believe that he was likely to see either his duty or his pleasure in giving away two thousand pounds for the purpose of rebuilding Château-Marcel—a place that he had never seen, and owed no duty to.

“But he will leave me *some* little grace in his will? or, if not to me, then to mamma and her children after her?” Kate urged in a tone of keen remonstrance, as if she felt that her cousin must have influence with the old man sufficient to ensure it.

But Mary Martha said she had none: “I wish he would, and I hope he may; but, dear Kate, he never speaks of his will. I know no more than you what he will do. It is all shooting at the moon. this talk of ours.”

Katherine’s rejoinder was bitter: “Uncle Richard never did anything for any of us until he took you up six months ago! I don’t know why I am calculating on his bounty now, unless because when one is young one has a

perpetual hope and faith that goodness and justice will prevail! Mamma did no wrong in marrying where she had given her heart; but she and her children might have starved for him! Mamma said only the last time we were together what a God's mercy it was that she had found another provider in Mr. Ockleston before Mr. Sheffield died."

Mary Martha did not attempt to answer this, which, indeed, admitted of no answer. She kissed Katherine, and bade her wait and see; and then she suggested that they should go to bed, for it was eleven o'clock, and she was sleepy—they were both sleepy.

Just then voices sounded at the door coming out of the long drawing-room, and Mr. Brooke came in, followed by Mons. de Marcel, and Mr. Grimston, consulting his watch. They all began to say something by way of apology, which M. M., with a touch of recollected mischief, cut short, saying: "Ah, I don't think our contemporaries would have served us so!" She knew one who

would certainly not. Her Uncle Richard understood where her thought and word glanced, and James Grimston stood rebuked. Perhaps the fault was his. He had appreciated the good talk with Mons. de Marcel about scenes and places that both were familiar with ; it was such a pleasure as came seldom in his way.

Mons. and Madame de Marcel were out in the brilliant next morning, almost as early as the swallows. Miss Brooke was no late sleeper either ; she did not trouble Grace to exercise her functions at the fresh hour of the day when she was pleased to rise, but Katherine beat her. Mary Martha saw her cousin, in a white sprigged cambric gown, and a vast shady hat of coarse chip, moving about among the trees, with her husband, at some distance from the house, when she peeped between her curtains to return thanks for fine weather on the day of the children's feast. Before breakfast the guests had been

all round the Tower outside, into the quadrangle, on the upper and lower terraces, and in the sunk garden, which was only a make-belief of a garden, and seldom visited by anybody. M. M. did not like it; she was waiting for George to make her a garden, where the sun would get in, and a shower of rain would not turn the grass to miry clay.

“You are well off here; your Tower stands as firm as a rock, and you have a fine extent of prospect, but we have charms of our own at our tumble-down old château, too,” Katherine said to her Uncle Richard as she took her seat by him at breakfast.

“It is good to go from home if only to find out how much better it suits us than any other place,” was his kindly response.

Mr. Brooke had heard from Mary Martha pretty bits of description and other incidental details of Château-Marcel, and judged that life there was healthy and natural. He knew what a decayed Norman château and family are, and did not despise them. And he had

already a perception of Kate's qualities. She was devoted to her own; Mons. de Marcel was her hero as well as her husband; their tumble-down old château was all the house they had, and therefore it possessed charms for her rivalling the Tower that stood like a rock. This was a reasonable and useful quality, but not rare; not a quality of distinction. That she was looking for a gift from himself did not vex him, or cause him to feel aggrieved, but he had no present intention of making her any gift. He liked Mons. de Marcel, and considered Katherine's marriage honourable to her; as for being poor, as they were poor, that did not lower the French gentleman one iota in his esteem. His disgust at her mother's marriage had been provoked, and subsisted still, for the reason that she had the bad taste to prefer a beautiful and fascinating person of no name, and having no roots anywhere, to a gentleman of the county, her brother's friend. That Captain Devine had turned out a thorough adventurer,

with as few virtues as roots, had only fulfilled his expectations, and Katherine resembled her father. Showing her the house in the course of the morning, Mr. Brooke pointed out his famous Great-aunt Sarah's picture, and bade her notice how the old beauty's characteristic features were repeated in Mary Martha. Kate did herself good by replying that her dear little cousin was wonderfully like himself.

"And she is more like mamma than I am. I believe in heredity, but it is unjust to push the principle far without studying each instance. You will remember that George Eliot presses it home very strongly in describing Hetty Sorrel, that faces and characters may be mis-matched."

Kate did not fawn or flatter, she was too honest for either ; and Mr. Brooke, taking his lesson without remark, did not credit her with her father's vices, though it was impossible to deny her his countenance. If the germs were in her, he hoped they were likely

to be cultivated out. Kate knew more of her father now than she did in her girlish days, when she made it a boast that she was his own child; and if she was too deeply absorbed in her own things, still she was more watchful of her disposition to covet the things of others. In fact, Kate was improved, was better for the companionship of a high-minded man whom she loved and admired sufficiently to let him guide her.

The afternoon proved as sunny, and the breeze as sweet and tempering to the midsummer glow, as could be desired for the school-children's treat. It was a ramble and a treat to them all the way to the Esterling woods. The hay was making in the fields they passed through till they reached the Squire's new road, and there they entered the cool shade of the pines, and presently turned off by the up and down grassy track which was the dis-used road, and led to the wood-yard, the workshops, and Oke's cottage, where the kettle was to be boiled.

Miss Brooke had that gift which is a gift, and cannot be earned—she could evoke the spirit that serves for love and is proud of serving. Perhaps they caught it from her, those who worked for her so cheerfully, kindly, indefatigably, that afternoon. There is magic in it. Great commanders all have it; it breathes about them as an atmosphere of good luck. What they undertake will be done, what they do will succeed and prosper; and those who follow them have faith that they shall deserve honours and rewards, or meet noble death as soldiers of theirs. So it went with the young squireess that day. Oke, who was bespoken to boil the kettle, had prepared to boil it in gipsy fashion out of doors, which it was a treat of itself to see, and quite a picture, and gave the tea a much finer and more excellent sort of flavour. Cook, who was bespoken to bake the buns, had infused into her innumerable bakings a sugar and spice which caused that year to stick in early memories as the year when

"The Lady gave the Treat first time." The lady had put on her white and jonquil sateen dress which pleased young eyes with its gaiety, and resisted the chance snatches of little hands wanting another bun, and the catchings of briars at hide and seek in the underwood. And she had with her another beautiful lady, "Oh, *my*! such a beauty, with roses all round her hat," who did not play games, but looked like a queen.

Miss Westley, in a gay chintz frock, was another effective figure, and took a forward part in both feast and fun, never sparing to use either arms or voice to get the children to come, to go, to sit quiet. The pupils also gave assistance, but were not original; and the rector, with the best intentions, was perpetually in somebody else's way.

"I wish Mr. George Marriott were here—he would help us, he always knows so well what to do," Zoe said to Miss Brooke, when cricket was being started on the wood-green for the boys, and the clamour was as of a lot of

battlesome sparrows. Miss Brooke answered pleasantly, "I wish he were."

Mr. Grimston rode up from Hardenware in the cool of the evening, just when Mr. Brooke was arriving with Monsieur de Marcel to witness the races. He did not dismount; his appearance was the signal for a rally of gazers.

"Please, stay where you are to be gazed at; the boys think much of a hero," Mary Martha entreated. James complied, and was an equestrian figure for the next half-hour, setting the runners in order, and giving the word of command to start. But when that was over he rode back to the town, replying to M.M.'s inquiry whether he was not coming on to the Tower with them:—

"I cannot, dear child; I have something else to do, or I should be very glad. Parry comes down to-night, and I want to see him."

Jack brought the carriage to the gate on the top of the hill, by which Mr. Grimston

left, and carried the squire and his party home by the road, while the children sang their way back to the village through the twilight woods and fields.

Katherine de Marcel said to her cousin :
“ It has been a real, happy English day, such as mamma and the novels talk of ; but I want to know who Mr. Grimston is, who calls you ‘ dear child ? ’ ”

Mary Martha laughed. “ That is his way,” said she ; and then she explained him—his acts and deeds, his honours, his family, and his relations with their Uncle Richard. Kate heard her with attention, making no further remark.

CHAPTER IX.

“LOVE WILL OUT.”

“I cannot love him ;
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble.”

SHAKSPEARE.

LADY DULCY CARLETON had not come to the school-feast. It was with her as with other apprentices to new states of life, she had to obey rules and submit to regulations. The Sisters of the Poor had taken her in, but on their own conditions ; the first of which was no holiday, no outing, no visit to friends until she had served six months in the community—unless, indeed, she wished to go and not return. But her confinement was not made over-strict within their bounds ; for Miss Brooke being in Hardenware the next month, saw her, followed her up Church Street without recognizing her figure in her

strange dress. She wore the dress of the Sisters, grey carmelite, black straw bonnet, and long veil hanging down behind. She had no gloves on, and her shapely, capable hands had quite lost their delicate colour. She was carrying a sick child to their infirmary, carrying it in her arms, and slowly, for it was very ill. Another Sister was with her, and they were talking as they went of the unhealthy season beginning early; August and September were so accounted of in the close and crowded town, but it was only July yet, and the moist heat was very oppressive; where the air did not circulate freely, sickeningly oppressive. Lady Dulcy's voice betrayed her to Miss Brooke, who slackened her pace as she came up with the Sisters, while Grace dropped behind.

"Ah! is it you? I have often thought of you," was the cheerful greeting she received. "And how is Jack? how are the Twins?"

"They are all well—Jack mopes and frets."

"I knew he would. But it will pass. You can tell him we have met, and how I am employed. I serve for children's ambulance, and they call me Sister Christopher. My strength is good for something here; I am not breaking my heart now."

"I see you are not." Mary Martha was quite simple and matter-of-fact about it, as Lady Dulcy herself appeared.

She spoke of the houses in Branksome Street as being fresh and clean, and the gardens at their back as shaded and cool, a pleasant change for the community from their condemned quarters in the Boundary Walks.

"I will not say come and see me yet, for I am in the infirmary, and cannot leave to go to the parlour. However, I shall see you again——"

"Oh, often again," said M. M., and suddenly she was struck with the sorrow of it all; but Sister Christopher just smiled, and nodded her "good-by."

They were come to the gate into the Four

Acres. Miss Brooke stopped to go in, and Lady Dulcy went gently on with the sick child in her arms, and the other Sister always talking.

"Poor lady, but she is sadly crooked—I had no idea," Grace said, surprised and shocked.

She was an ungainly figure indeed, but she made no sign of remembering that, or anything but Jack and the Twins. Evidently it was no hindrance to her work. Already the poor in the streets knew her, and had her name of Sister Christopher quite pat. As she went along the church-wall, two or three forlorn ones stood to look after her.

Mary Martha crossed the sunburnt grass to Roger Brooke's old house, and entered. She had a room of her own there now, comfortably swept and garnished, where she could rest and wait till her Uncle Richard's business was finished, when hers happened to be finished the first. She was settling imperceptibly into the regular ways and customs

of a country lady, and came down into the town to shop, or to see Mrs. Grimston and Mrs. Howe whenever duty or pleasure called her. She had plenty to do and to think of. One thing after another was being transferred to her, until now the whole housekeeping of the Tower was under her direction, and she did not perform it in a perfunctory way. She was exceedingly methodical and orderly. Having certain charges entrusted to her, she gave herself the trouble to learn how they were best fulfilled, and in taking these pains to begin with, she no doubt saved herself much waste of time and thought both then and later on. This had been one of her busy days; her commissions for the house had been many and various, and she sat down now tiredly, to consult her memoranda and make sure that nothing was forgotten.

All was right, all was duly done, and while Grace went below to bring her that cup of coffee which was her refreshment on these occasions, she moved to the window over-

looking the green, to see the progress of the new buildings. The workmen were hammering away at the timbers of the roof, and tiles to cover it in were being carted upon the ground. The trustees were holding a meeting in the board-room upstairs, and now and then, in pauses of the noise out-of-doors, she heard a strong voice, which she knew to be young Parry's, reading monotonously on in some tedious law-paper. Mr. Brooke had said that he hoped it was one of the last they would need to hold. On the first of August the trust would expire, and his free and independent authority come into exercise. He showed himself in no way impatient for it, or anxious, since the day of his induction was drawing in sight. He was well, energetic, and purposeful; and though he might be weary and glad to rest after these long hours in the town, he slept better of nights, and was brisk and ready for his work or book the next morning. For some while back, Mary Martha had not heard the wakeful echoes of

his footsteps in the gallery, which had disturbed her when she first came to the Tower, and it seemed as if the old man was tasting a satisfaction in his later life which had been withheld till now. And he was exceedingly good to her.

Everything appeared to be going exactly as he would have it with her and James Grimston. No one had spoken openly yet, but all was steadily tending, as he believed, to the conclusion he had planned and schemed for. Probably Mrs. Ockleston mentioned her fears and suspicions to Katherine de Marcel in confidence more than once during the many quiet hours they spent together at Saxby; for when Monsieur de Marcel and his wife returned to the Tower towards the end of July, Katherine had an interested, sympathetic air with her cousin, as if she were alert for discoveries or revelations. None, however, were made to her. Mary Martha was chiefly intent on providing their guests with diversions, driving with them

about the country, carrying them to such entertainments as opportunely befel at Hardenware, and introducing Katherine to the scenes made dear and familiar by her mother's reminiscences.

The days passed agreeably enough with the ladies about the house and the village, and Monsieur de Marcel, when not engaged on more distant excursions, made himself happy in a linen coat and a Panama hat, following his own pursuits for the most part in his own company. It was a distress to Katherine to find the garden of her mother's youth almost denuded of roses, and treated by young people as a playground. But times were changed, and manners with them.

Miss Westley who was fond of little bustles in aid of the parish funds had got up a bazaar in the rectory garden, and it was on this occasion Katherine saw it. The bazaar was to provide a bell and harmonium for the Sunday school, and Mary Martha went down with her cousin to spend her own and her

Uncle Richard's contributions to the same. The loud discordance of a brass band filled the warm summer atmosphere at four o'clock, and the usual collection of trumpery that nobody wants to buy was being taken at ruinous prices by visitors impatient to acquit themselves of local obligations and begone out of the noise and heat. Zoe herself was in lively humour, mistress of an extemporized post-office and parcels' delivery company, midway between the entrance gates and the stalls. As her friends and neighbours came in and went out she pressed upon them letters at double postage, and parcels of which the carriage to pay was fixed according to the supposed stinginess or otherwise of the consignee. Zoe would have shown herself wiser in her generation had she offered these letters and parcels only to the company going away. Some, whether coming or going, said, "No, thank'ye Miss Westley," and would not be persuaded to accept letters free, or parcels for nothing. They were

wary of Zoe's wit, having heard of it, or perhaps chafed at it in their own persons ; but others were without that experience, who took what was offered, paid their pence, and passed on.

Amongst these were the young squiress, and by-and-by Mr. Grimston. Katherine de Marcel held her head very high, refusing to see what Miss Westley urged her to take, and said to Mary Martha : “ Don't read that. Ten to one it is some incivility.” M. M. tore it into little pieces unopened, and scattered them as she walked on ; but Mr. Grimston had no adviser beside him when he arrived, and he read his. Two elderly single ladies had just fallen into the same trap and were so vastly disconcerted that they quite forgot to spend money at the bazaar. Mr. Grimston was even more amazed and confounded. He gave his attention entirely to finding out Miss Brooke, and when he had found her to bringing her away. These little bazaars, he said, were rougher and more

vulgar every time they recurred. M. M., observing the grey envelope Zoe used to enclose her missives sticking out of his breast pocket, asked what news he had received, and told him that a letter had been given her too. A red stain came on his cheek, and he exclaimed hotly: "You did not read it, dear child?" to which she answered, surprised but explicit: "No, I did not even open it. I tore it up and dropped it. Kate said it was probably some impertinence."

This episode, trifling enough in itself, was however the prelude to one of greater consequence. Katherine de Marcel had noticed Mr. Grimston's intense annoyance, and had heard again his adjuration of her cousin by the term of endearment that he was in the habit of using, and was sure there must be a deeper meaning in it. Mary Martha's explanation had not satisfied her on the former occasion; and at Saxby Mrs. Ockleston had conveyed her own impressions to her daughter. Kate had returned to the

Tower bent on finding out how much they were worth ; and she had come to believe that they were founded on fact. She wanted to be assured of it, and other little incidents within the next day or two tending to confirm her belief, she made an opportunity of engaging Mary Martha in an intimate cousinly conversation, beginning with the expression of a devout hope that she should hear by-and-by of an engagement for her, to end ultimately in a marriage as happy as her own.

"I won't disappoint you, Kate, if I can help it," M. M. said gaily, it being her policy to stave off forbidden confidences by laughing sentiment away.

"I like Mr. Grimston. He is a gentleman rather grave and old for such a light-hearted whim of a girl as you, but you want ballast. Mamma says you want ballast," Katherine went on, suggesting, not interrogating.

"Much obliged to Aunt Lena, I'm sure ! But she is not prescribing Mr. Grimston in

that capacity, I trust? She ought to know better."

"She thought she did know better once, but when she saw you all in London together she fancied that she must have been deceived. She thinks now and so do I—that Uncle Richard designs you shall marry James Grimston. And whether *you* mean it or not, I have a conviction that James Grimston's heart is in it too."

"Oh, Kate, *please* don't say so, you have no *right* to say so! You are mistaken, *utterly* mistaken; we have never thought of such a thing," M. M. cried, with a sincerity of denial that it was impossible to doubt—but she was reflecting as she spoke.

"*You* may not have thought of it—but the others have. It is the chief thing they do think of, in my opinion. Don't you begin to see it now you hear of it? Are not your eyes opening?"

"No, *no*, nothing of the kind! We are the best friends in the world," but here M. M.

paused a minute and sighed, and then went on crossly, pettishly : “ How *could* you be so disagreeable as to put it into my head, Kate ? It was quite unnecessary, and it isn’t true—I call it such *bad* taste to talk of those things ? And we have to see each other nearly every day.”

Katherine shrugged her shoulders, deprecating this much ado about nothing, but said that she was sorry she had spoken since M. M. was vexed ; but it was true all the same, and so she would have to know before long. A warning could therefore do her no harm, and she had only to make as if she had not heard it—which was much easier said than done.

In this position of Mary Martha’s feelings and private affairs the visit of the De Marcells drew to its close. Katherine had expressed a strong wish to be at the Tower at the actual time the Trust died, as if expectant of some celebration which might give her an air of participating in the event. But Mr.

Brooke designed none ; and the demise took place in the presence of five elderly gentlemen and two younger, who were all thankful that its lingering tribulations were over. They drank a glass of sherry together, and parted ; three of them to be seen in Roger Brooke's old house no more, the other three to resume work on new lines, with James Grimston as agent in chief and managing director of the Hardenware Estates. Mr. Brooke returned to the Tower alone on the evening of the day, very tired, half out of humour and half depressed ; and Katherine de Marcel remarked to Mary Martha that it was as if nothing had happened. So the great crises of life come and pass, and it seems to those looking on that nothing has happened. But the change may go deep though there be no bubbles on the surface, and Mr. Brooke felt this change as in some sort a premonition of the last that could happen to him. His spirits were not raised by thinking of it thus.

CHAPTER X.

A BASKET OF ROSES.

"Love, unreturn'd,
 Hath gracious uses ; the keen pang departs,
 The sweetness never." SMITH.

How far on the way to love does a high admiration reach ? No way at all, perhaps. It is undeniable that a just and true admiration of James Grimston had seized on Mary Martha's mind and imagination at the very beginning of their acquaintance. James had the great qualities that a generous mind approves, and M. M. conceived for him that quiet, implicit confidence which results from liking and being liked. She knew James liked her, and she used no stronger term to express the degree of friendliness and intimacy that grew fast between them during these months. If he had been a much elder

brother, she could not have thought more of him, or felt a deeper reliance on his perfect goodwill and helpfulness. Her Uncle Richard looked on as complaisantly as it was possible for an old man wearing away from the world to look upon what seemed to promise a complete conquest and success to his schemes. She was aware that James Grimston was more to her Uncle Richard than herself. He was an old friend, if he was nothing else, and she was only a girl, a young kinswoman, whom he took pleasure in, but who could do nothing for him, and be nothing, unless she were fated to be that grievous thing—the disappointment of his last and dearest hopes.

“Uncle Richard designs that you shall marry James Grimston, and I believe that James Grimston’s heart is in it too,” her Cousin Kate had said lightly, as if it were a light matter to have Uncle Richard living in hopes that could never, never come true, and for these hopes’ sake doing what he could to

teach her to forget George. Far be it from her to forget George, even for one moment of time ! No breath of disloyalty to George should ever dim the clear mirror of her love, or cast a shadow between them. Oh ! that he would come home, that she dared call him to come home and be near her in this trouble. She tried sometimes to discredit Kate's sagacity, and to believe that she was mistaken : but remembered trifles were Kate's witnesses to confirm the truth which she had given voice.

In many ways silence is excellent, and in none more excellent than as a hoarder of strength. Mary Martha had to keep her own counsel ; perhaps she might not have opened it even had she been blessed with the presence of Elizabeth ; so many things are better left unspoken. She wished, wished ardently, that Katherine had held her peace, and not given her this secret thorn, to prick her and make her heart bleed. For with or without reason she was sorry for her Uncle Richard,

whom she must vex and thwart ; and it was no satisfaction to consider how far he was to blame in bringing his disappointment upon himself. As for James Grimston, she averted her mind at once and decisively from the idea of his loving her ; she was absolutely silent to herself upon that : she wanted to hold him as a friend, both for the past and the future, and did not reason about it. Only she supposed, that if he knew she cared for George Marriott first and best, he would just stay where he was, and not be angry. That glove of his, which she had put in her table-drawer to give him, and had not recollected since, she recollected now, and sought it, and brought it out, and finally handed it to Dekker, going in to luncheon the day after the De Marcels left the Tower.

“ What is that ? ” Mr. Brooke asked, a little sharply.

“ Only that dogskin glove of Mr. Grimston’s which I took care of for him ; I always forget it when he is here,” she said nervously.

The old man glanced at her with a keenness which turned her pale cheek to a blush. Innocent, she felt guilty—"Oh!" said he, "as you have kept it so long, keep it until he comes again, and then give it him."

"Very well; put it down, Dekker."

Dekker laid it on the table beside her, and when she rose she carried it back to its former place, and was annoyed with herself for having so foolishly invited her Uncle Richard's notice. Mr. Brooke could not but reflect upon the incident: Dekker might have had his thoughts too.

It is seldom very difficult for men to persuade themselves that the thing they want to happen is the thing that will happen. Mr. Brooke knew the behind-scenes which James Grimston did not know, and yet he rested very composedly on his expectations of what the event would be. Mary Martha had certainly behaved well thus far. She had lost neither her good humour nor her good looks. She had taken every pleasure

that came in her way, as if she enjoyed it; and had betrayed no resentment at being debarred from the higher pleasure of corresponding with her true lover. It might have been otherwise had she seen into her Uncle Richard's strategy, which he masked with the pretence of giving her time to find herself out. The longer George Marriott's absence grew, the further into the distance his figure receded; his consequence dwindled in the same proportion, and Mr. Brooke was by this time all but convinced that he was as much lost to memory as lost to sight, for his name had never been heard to pass Mary Martha's lips at the Tower since the visit to London. She had observed the rules laid down for this year of separation, and if one or two lively imaginations had coupled them as lovers in the snow time, the suggestion had not encouragement enough to increase into a report. But it may safely be said that George was as present with her as

a second conscience, and nothing she thought, did, or looked forward to, was without some reference to him.

Mr. Brooke made no sign of thinking further about the glove. If he had attached any significance to M. M.'s apparent treasuring of that waif of James's, he had known how to seem blind. But whatever he was pleased to *seem*, he could not be really blind to her present disquiet. Kate's warning had put her more about than any similar trial that had overtaken her. All her previous difficulties had been simple; she could see her way out of them. But this was tortuous, this was complex, and she did *not* see to the end of it. It would have been much better if Kate had held her peace, and left her Uncle Richard and Mr. Grimston to reveal their own views at their own time, when the collision would have inspired her with wits to answer them. It was very officious of Kate, very unnecessary—and what was she to do? She asked

herself many times over what she was to do ; and finally had to leave it there, and do nothing.

James Grimston was coming and going more frequently than ever in these days. There was a very great deal of Hardware business to be got through, and since he had resigned his inspectorship his days were Mr. Brooke's and his own. Mr. Brooke could never see too much of him, and he could never see too much of Mary Martha. She had not given him back his glove ; she had been afraid to precipitate a trouble that her guardian angel might be commissioned to save her. If James was in love, she liked George's way best—that was the feeling she had about it. She was called to sit at attention often while affairs were being talked over, and James was as instructive, as patient, and as kind as kind could be ; but if Kate had not bidden her open her eyes she believed that they would not have opened of their own accord ever—*ever*. The crisis

of events came on, indeed, without that necessity, though it did not come without casting shadows before. The shadows were changes in Mary Martha's self. It cannot be said that she tried to be the same, for she never thought about it, but insensibly a reserve pervaded her manner towards Mr. Grimston; and a gentle dignity and distance, always in her character, was being developed in a rather severe degree towards her Uncle Richard. Mr. Brooke was promptly aware of it, and referred it to its actual cause—to her suspicion that he was conspiring against George, not for this year only, but for all their lives. James Grimston continued blind, and still adjured her to attend to work or go to play by the name of "Dear child."

The crisis arrived on a certain Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Marriott had brought a basket of roses into church in the morning, and after service she stepped across the chancel, and handed it up to Mary Martha, with a soft little word—"George's birthday"—

to which M. M. blushed the reply that she knew—" *With his love.*"

"What was that?" Mr. Brooke asked at going out of his private door into the churchyard.

"His mother said that it was George's birthday," was the answer—pretty, pleasant, ingeniously venturesome, and like herself again.

"And you are to *fête* it?" said Uncle Richard.

"Yes!" She was as happy and smiling as ever he had seen her. All her frostiness had suddenly vanished under that warm breath from the sunny south. " *With his love,*" George's mother said.

Mary Martha plunged the basket of roses into a bowl of water, and lost herself in beautiful dreams before them the greater part of the afternoon, and did not feel that the afternoon was wasted, though her notes in "Letts's Diary" were abridged thereby. Indeed, the week last past was left a blank,

and that day's record was simply, "*A basket of Roses.*" Already some of these notes of hers had become symbols of difficult and doubtful interpretation. As she wrote those four words the thought just glanced at her and was gone:—should she some day have to consider what was their parable? There was one rose a little overblown. It was one of many, and called "Rubens"—a delicate, flesh-tinted rose, finely shaped, and a rose that faded kindly, sweet to the very last, keeping with its scent of tea a sub-scent of tobacco—the most exquisite, the most fragrant. It was George's favourite rose for that very reason. A petal of this rose fell, and M. M., in drawing it from amongst the others, shook it all loose upon the table. These were idle moments, musing moments, and as the pale leaves lay scattered, she began to move them about with her fingers, and then to dispose them in the form of letters, which, when she had arranged them in order, stood plainly for "*George.*"

Heedlessly she left the name there to speak for itself, to tell a tale maybe, and went out, and down into the woods, where she must have strayed rather long ; for, coming round again to the door upon the terrace, she was met by her Uncle Richard and Mr. Grimston, who said that they had feared she was going to leave them without their cup of tea.

“I did not know that you were here,” she said to Mr. Grimston, giving him her hand.

They went leisurely all together through the long drawing-room to her bower, where the sweetness of the roses betrayed them at the opening of the door. James marched straight to the table, and buried his face in their beauty.

“What a treat!—the thing one chiefly misses in a smoky town is the flowers,” cried he ; and then stood up, contemplating them with an air of serene enjoyment.

At the same instant Mr. Brooke was deciphering the name done in rose-petals. Looking up from it he looked directly at

Mary Martha, who met his eyes with a slight start, and a very visible change of countenance. It was not done on purpose—that was what he wanted to know; and he just swept his hand over it, making all confusion. He made more confusion than he intended or could have desired; for he frightened her; and James Grimston happening to remark that such roses used to grow in the old rectory garden, but nowhere else that he knew of, M. M. answered him that those grew at the Manor; it was George's birthday, and his mother had brought them to church to give her. She had begun to say it in a nervous tremor, and she finished in desperation, turning aside to her teatray, and causing the cups and spoons to jingle as they had never jingled in her handling before.

James stood a full minute longer without moving a muscle, staring at the roses, and listening as to some voice that had not ceased. Mr. Brooke had walked away to the window

that gave upon the quadrangle while M. M. was speaking. He walked back now, and took his cup of tea.

"Won't you have some, James?" he said; and his deluded friend turned about, and took his cup from Mary Martha's hand too. Her eyes were veiled, and he could make his quiet observation of her. He never blamed her; but neither did he ever call her "Dear child" any more. His dream was ended.

To his old friend he said presently—at the first moment they were alone together: "Why did you encourage me to trespass on 'George's' Manor?"

"There was no engagement—there *is* no engagement," Mr. Brooke replied hotly, defending himself.

"Ah, my friend, but there *is* an engagement!" James was not inclined for much talking about it, only he said he would not have measured himself against George Marriott had he known that George was already in the field.

“Why not? Who is George Marriott?” was the old Squire’s rejoinder, hard and sharp. But as Grimston gave him no answer, which was perhaps his heaviest reproach, he said by-and-by with something like a groan: “I repent, James, I repent! You have been like a son to me, and a man wants to do the best he can for his son.”

Mr. Grimston was thrown into a deep study. He had come to the Tower to stay the night, and must not beat a retreat. He would have to come again, and to keep on coming, for Mr. Brooke’s sake and his business, and it would be wisest to put himself aside as fast and entirely as possible. The September evening was magnificent, and the two gentlemen entered the long drawing-room half an hour before dinner, ostensibly to witness the glories of the sunset. Warned by Grace, Mary Martha went in to them there, and was received by her Uncle Richard with a hand stretched out and a compliment on her pretty dressing.

He had seen her dress on many previous evenings, but it had a new and festal air with George's roses pinned about it. M. M. was beginning to know herself better than she did even six months ago. If she had a tender heart she had pride to shield it, and knew the value of a gentle stateliness in hiding bashful pain. She had decked her dress with George's roses to honour him, and mentally had draped herself for the part she had to play. She was a wonderful actress, with those flashes of spontaneity which tell as masterstrokes of genius. She accepted her Uncle Richard's peace-offering of his hand with a charming little caress; then looked up brightly, as if to say: why not, when he is so good, and Mr. Grimston is taken into our confidence?

Mary Martha had done no wrong—why should she be punished? Mr. Brooke had made a bad blunder, and was not yet fully awakened to how bad a blunder it was. But he tacitly acknowledged that a certain barrier

had fallen, and going to dinner he ordered Dekker to open a bottle of champagne. Though the young mistress seldom drank wine, the old servant, in the exercise of his private judgment, prepared at the proper moment to fill her glass. She declined it with her customary gesture. "Oh, but you must—to-day of all days," said her Uncle Richard. "*George's birthday*," added Mr. Grimston, and Dekker poured on, pursing his old mouth in kindly sympathy. M. M.'s eyes shone. "To George's very good health!" quoth she. "And his safe coming home again, eh?" her Uncle Richard suggested. "And his safe coming home again," she echoed.

It appeared to Mary Martha, now this crisis was safely over, that she had only to betray nothing of the suspicion that Katherine had put into her mind, and life would go on just as it had gone before. But in this she was deceived. They all made an effort to continue in their accustomed tranquil

way, but to keep this up proved beyond James Grimston's power. His feelings had grown beyond his control, and his only security against rash and foolish speaking was not to give himself the opportunity. The result was that he came less often to the Tower, and Mr. Brooke took the road more frequently to Hardenware. They had repeated conversations, explanations, arguments. The gist of Mr. Brooke's pleading was that James should not treat the trivial incident of the roses as conclusive. But James knew it was not trivial and that it was conclusive. Fortune had no sweets of life in store for him.

Mr. Brooke had his own private grief, which did not diminish but increased. The old man felt sorrowfully that the hope was slipping away which had helped to keep him living. He was dull, depressed, and Dr. Sparrow declared him to be far from well. When Mr. Grimston came to the Tower, as perforce he must since Mr. Brooke was forbidden to go to the town, Mary

Martha was not summoned to their council. If he stayed to lunch he seemed pre-occupied or abstracted. His aspect towards her was altered; no longer kindly, but absent, distant, reserved. If she endeavoured to abridge the distance she felt plainly that she was discouraged, purposely discouraged. He always rode away early now, giving for his reason the earlier nightfall; but time was when he was ready to stay and dine and sleep, and ride away first thing in the morning, for the pleasure of the evening with his old friend and her.

One Friday afternoon it happened that young Parry came in his stead, bringing papers to be signed, and an excuse for Mr. Grimston's absence. Mr. Brooke mentioned it, and seemed even more dispirited than the occasion called for. He said that James had led him to believe he would come, and perhaps remain over the Sunday, and he had not expected that he would fail him. The old man looked quite sadly, and Mary Martha felt

pitiful, self-reproachful ; dreadfully eager to restore the former state of things.

“ You miss your friend, Uncle Richard ? Why does he not come ? It is ten days since I have seen him,” she said, counting the days.

“ He has been twice since then—in the morning. We did not send for you—it was only the usual thing, papers to read over and sign. Perhaps he is more occupied than we suppose. I will go to Hardenware on Monday.”

But Monday was a chill October day, with sobbing wind and driving rain, and Mr. Brooke was not tempted to face the bad weather. In the afternoon Dr. Sparrow called to see him, and he called again the next morning. It was on that morning Grace spoke to her young mistress about Mr. Grimston's room, inquiring whether the same changes should be made there as were making in her room and the master's, in preparation for the advancing winter. “ Let them arrange

it as they have done in previous years—I know nothing about it,” she said, showing surprise at the question; but as she went away her face burned. She imagined the servants were noticing that Mr. Grimston had almost ceased to come to the Tower, and she could not put aside the fear that they had guessed what Katherine de Marcel had guessed. She shrank from being subject to their observation because of Mr. Grimston. If they had seen and sympathized in her true love for George Marriott, that she would have taken kindly, simply, naturally; but they might be blaming her because their old master was deprived of his friend. She blamed herself; she felt guilty because it was her fault, though her innocent fault. It made her as nearly as possible unhappy. Not with all that she could do could she make up to him for James whom she excluded—who kept away because she was there.

And now Mr. Parry came again to the Tower, and young Parry; and there were

long closetings with Mr. Brooke, and Dekker was called into the study more than once, and from Mr. Parry's visage it was plain to discerning persons that he was far from liking his business. Grace mentioned, as if it were no secret in the household, that since master had come into the great property at Hardenware, he was forced to make a new will, and to make a just will when one was worth a deal of money and had no children, must take a deal of thought. Her Uncle Richard had not told Mary Martha that it was his will that gave so much perplexity to himself and his lawyer, but no doubt Grace was right, and Dekker went into the study to act as a witness; for he was an old servant, over thirty years with the squire, and much in his confidence.

M. M. would have felt more unhappy and more put on one side than she did, but that, as October waned, and November began, it was brought to her by a little bird, for good tidings, that George was coming home—

he was to sail about the twentieth in the *Berenice*, and would be in England before the end of the month. Still, even with this joyful prospect in view she could not put away her melancholy musings entirely; and when Mr. Parry and his son were gone, and her Uncle Richard was left with only herself, who had lost confidence and did not please him as before, it was dreary living through the dull days and long evenings alone together, without the hope of any visitor to break the monotony. Her birthday on the twenty-ninth of October went over unnoticed. Mr. Brooke whatever his foibles, had the instincts, sentiments and manners of a gentleman. M. M. had nothing to fear from any rudeness of nature, or harshness of temper in him. They disagreed on a great matter, and the opposition would be passive, steady, and most likely dumb. Both were of the disposition that yields to the slow process of alienation, while shrinking from contest and open war. Mr. Brooke did not fail to keep in

mind the slightness of his claims to deference where his young kinswoman's heart and life were involved. But his hopes had been very dear to him, and the dearer since he had seen how thoroughly she suited and satisfied James Grimston, and how perfectly she would fit into his plans for making good again James's honourable though broken life. These reflections were with him late and early. Mary Martha knew by his fits of silence and abstraction, when he was conning over his disappointment. Hardly could a brilliant chapter of a story entice his thoughts away from it, and M. M. caught herself sighing sometimes and wondering how it would all end.

It ended temporarily in Mr. Brooke's going down to the house in the Four Acres, and staying there. It was on a dark wintry day he went, and Mary Martha had not been invited to go with him. Peremptory business was lingering, he had told her before he started, but not that he might perhaps remain

in the town. In the afternoon, Jack was sent home with the carriage, and a note from Mr. Brooke to the young mistress to say that she was not to expect him until she saw him ; he hoped things would march a little more quickly when he was on the spot ; and as Sparrow objected to his taking the road in the cold weather the only alternative was to stay in town, and afford no excuse for the dilatoriness of other people by being out of the way himself when he was wanted.

M. M. spent a very sad and serious evening alone, trying to read, but checked at every moment by intrusive fancies ; listening to the sough of the rising wind, with a pain in her throat and a weight on her heart as of a new sorrow coming to meet her ; between whiles holding back the curtain to look out into the darkness of the night, which she could not see for unbidden tears in her eyes. She was desperately hurt, but it was for her Uncle Richard she grieved, more than herself—she would get over it, she knew she

would ; but he was old and had no more chances left. She opened the drawer where James's glove still lay, and took it up. "I have vexed and disappointed them both, and they shun me," she said. Her Uncle Richard was staying in Hardenware to expedite peremptory work, no doubt ; but also to have James Grimston's company—driven out of his house by her. And she must make as if she had nothing to do with it.

Sleep was coy that night, she was restless, uneasy ; if she dropped into a doze it was to awake as from the stress of a bad dream, to fancy she heard cries, wailings, loud noises above the wind.

Two days of wet weather exempted her from stirring beyond the precincts of the Tower. She could only forward letters, and send good little homely notes with them. No one came to visit her, but she was not very dull ; George was now on the sea, home-bound, and it would be strange if she was not happy some of her solitary hours. The third morn-

ing rose fair and beautiful, and with spirits renewed and courage revived, she ordered Jack to prepare to carry her down to the town. Passing through the study to pick up the letters which she intended to take with her instead of reposting them, she recollected the *Standards* that she had not read since her Uncle Richard left, and bade Dekker bring them, in case his master had not seen them. Dekker said, however, that the master would not have missed his daily paper. The old servant looked and spoke as if the troubles of the house were infecting him too; and Grace had not a word to say on the drive. M. M. wished that she had brought the papers to read herself—but her Uncle Richard was not likely to catechize her about the public news in the short while they would be together.

CHAPTER XI.

SUSPENSE.

“One half-hour that’s made up here
With grief, seems longer than a year.”

HERRICK.

“MR. GEORGE MARRIOTT was coming home in the *Berenice*; I hope he has not come in for this storm,” was a remark in general circulation at Stockleigh, during the two days of bad weather that Miss Brooke was shut up at the Tower after the Squire went to Hardenware.

People made the remark because the daily papers, in their record of storms and wrecks, had a report that the *Berenice* was lost. The next morning’s *Standard* certified the report, adding that it was believed some of both passengers and crew would have been picked up. Dekker intercepted the newspapers,

and carried none to the young mistress. Except herself, everybody in the house knew that the ship George Marriott sailed in, had gone down in the storm of three nights ago; and when she ordered the carriage with a cheerfulness that had been absent from her face since the master left, the servants said it was heartbreaking to think of. But no one spoke. At the Manor there was intense grief and excitement, but also patience and hope. "I wonder whether that sweet girl at the Tower knows?" Mrs. Marriott said twenty times in the day; but no one went. George's father had gone to London to get the earliest news. The *Berenice* was an Australian ship that called for passengers at ports nearer home, and all England was waiting at this moment for tidings from the sea, and lists of survivors. This was why Dekker looked dull, and Grace was mute on the way to the town.

When Mary Martha arrived at the Four Acres she left the carriage at the gate, and

walked across the green to the house. Going upstairs she found that her *special* room had been invaded by her Uncle Richard. It was warmer than the old board-room of the trustees, and he had taken possession. Mr. Grimston and Mr. Parry were with him there, all seated at the table with pens, ink and paper in their customary fashion, but when she opened the door they were otherwise occupied—James Grimston was reading in a hushed voice the last news of the *Berenice*, and the others were listening with intent, strained interest. Mr. Brooke looked very ill, ten years older for the anxiety and distress of the past forty-eight hours, and when M. M. presented herself with her gentle, unconscious air, each was in his way startled, and showed it. She only imagined that they felt *caught* as intruders into her quarters.

“*This* is your peremptory business, is it, Uncle Richard?” said she, disconcerted too, and uttering the first thought that rose in her mind.

Mr. Brooke made her no answer—he was staring hard at her, and she at him, suddenly struck by the alteration in his appearance. James Grimston was moving to go away, the newspaper still in his hand; Mr. Parry, who had been leaning on the table, his spectacles pushed up on his forehead, seemed about to follow him, but Mr. Brooke said: “Don’t leave us, Parry——”

“Don’t let me disturb anybody. I came down because it is a fine day again, and I thought that Uncle Richard might be wanting to come home,” Mary Martha said, glancing from one to another, and then at her Uncle Richard again, whose grey, troubled visage half-alarmed her.

“Yes, yes, I’ll come home with you. If Jack has not put up the carriage we will go now, at once.”

“He is at the gate waiting for orders. Must we go just at once? I have a few things to do in the shops—but Grace can do them, and come back in the train.”

“Yes, leave Grace to do the shops——”

Mr. Parry interposed with some reminder of appointments, and Mr. Brooke turned his eyes to the timepiece on the mantelshelf. Mary Martha also had an appointment which she was wishing to keep—a promise to Mrs. Howe—but that need not take long. She waited for the next word. Her Uncle Richard cast a miserable gaze upon her, and sighed out, “In half an hour, tell Jack.”

“Thanks! That will give me time to run in and see Mrs. Howe—and I’ll tell Jack ‘home’ in half an hour.”

She was gone before either Mr. Brooke or Mr. Parry could find any excuse to keep her. James Grimston loitering in the hall, took her hand, which he had not done before, and looked in her face with wistful inquiry: “Uncle Richard is going back with me,” she said, more seriously than she had yet spoken. “He has been neglecting himself; it does not suit him to be here.—I wish you would not *quite* forsake us at the Tower.

You are dreadfully missed—*dreadfully*, I can tell you," she went on with an emphatic little gesture ; and then she escaped.

James returned upstairs: "She does not know—she has heard nothing," he said.

"Evidently nothing. She has gone to the vicarage. They will tell her there."

Mary Martha's acquaintance with Mrs. Howe had improved into a genuine friendliness. They did not speak of George in the light M. M. was forbidden to speak of him, but his name was not under the seal of silence between them. If there had been no George in question, they might yet have become friends, for there was in each much that the other liked.

Deb. opened the door, who first said that her mistress could see nobody, and then bethought herself and said would Miss Brooke step in, and wait till she inquired? Instantly a door that stood ajar was opened wide, and Mrs. Howe came out with hands held towards her, impetuously, tenderly: "I heard your

name—you want to know what more news we have? The papers really have the earliest, and the fullest—come in here. We were just reading what the *Standard* says.”

“Ah! That was what they were doing then, across the green—Uncle Richard, Mr. Grimston and Mr. Parry?” Mary Martha said under her breath, reflecting with a vague sense of dread what this could be which everybody knew but herself, and which was on the point of being told her. She made a sudden rally of her wits, and added in a clear explanatory voice: “The fact is that I have been alone for three days; Uncle Richard came down here on Tuesday and stayed; and I have not looked into the *Standard* since he left me. I must make up for arrears this evening. But what is it that has happened? What great news is there?”

Mrs. Howe turned quickly and tears started to her eyes: “You happy, you blessed girl, to have your trial shortened!” cried she, and quite broke down.

It was the library they had entered, and Mr. Howe was sitting there, the newspaper before him. Miss Brooke looked at him—she could not speak again.

“It is the *Berenice*,” he said. “The ship was lost between Tuesday sunset and Wednesday morning; she went down in the storm, but many were saved. Some have been landed, and here is a list of them, and their account of the wreck.”

Mary Martha did not ask a single question; she held out her hand for the paper, and when it was given her she went to the window and read it. George Marriott's name was not in the list of those saved, but it occurred in the account of their rescue, as that of a passenger who had been instant in his services for the women and children, who had prevented a panic that might have lost them all, and who had been last seen by the writer of the account holding back a man of the crew who was making for another boat already crowded. The writer had heard him

say, and the captain and another consent to it, that when they had given as many as the boats would hold their chance, they would take their own on spars and rafts—broken pieces of the ship; for they were in the very highway of the sea, and would have good chances of being picked up when day dawned.

As M. M. finished the perusal she moved back to the table, and laid the paper down: "There is nothing to be done, but only to wait," she said, and stood some minutes in deep thought, recalling what the night had been with her, how restless and haunted with dreams and weird voices while George was in this mortal peril, and how completely lightened her heart had been again since. Mrs. Howe had recovered herself, but she was amazed at the control of this girl who showed her sense of the gravity of the circumstances chiefly by her intense self-suppression. "I have not seen his mother," was all that she said more, and this at just going out.

"Try to see her. It will please her. Only Dolly is with her; my father has gone to London," Mrs. Howe whispered tearfully.

"I will go before going home," M. M. said, and then they separated.

The half-hour had been exceeded, and Mr. Brooke was coming out to the carriage on Mr. Grimston's arm as Mary Martha turned that way. When they were seated James said that he would come up to the Tower in the evening, and Mr. Brooke begged him not to fail. Then the door was shut, and they drove off through the busy streets, silent together until they were beyond the dower-house and on the country road.

It was a difficult ordeal for both, this meeting in the crisis and suspense of disaster, but Mr. Brooke was by far the more severely tried. Ever since the intelligence had come that the *Berenice* was lost he had been suffering pangs of remorse and pity; figuring a repetition of his own bereft life in the life of this girl whom he had neglected for eighteen

years, and taken up at last to divide her from others who loved her more. It had not occurred to him (or only to be put aside) that this calamity might reopen him the way to compass his own projects—it was not in his better nature to imagine one beloved and dead become a stepping-stone for any other to pass over to his goal. Nor had any suspicion of such dark broodings touched Mary Martha's mind. Yet both were constrained. Each seemed to be waiting for the other to speak. Mr. Brooke could find no words, or at least, he did not. But on the crest of the hill when Jack stopped to breathe his horses, Mary Martha, compassionating his distress, began to say: "Don't grieve so, Uncle Richard. I feel sure, *sure* that George is safe. They gave me the last account to read at the vicarage; George kept his head; he is cool, he sees what can be done, and what it is useless to attempt. Then he is strong and agile, and a *famous* swimmer. He would have every chance of

escape that a man can possess in himself. And he would cry to God in his danger—for he is *good*, George *believes*; he does not talk much of religion, but it is easy to feel if you know him that God is in all his thoughts.”

It sounded very pathetic to the old man to hear her trying to comfort him who must have so needed comfort herself, but in giving she received it too. “I cannot despair or be unhappy with my mind full of that story. I don’t like to hear men praised for doing what it would be shame to them to leave undone, but until we know that George can never, never come home any more, I shall pray to keep my heart in peace. George did what he could to save others, and if he died in doing it, well—*well*—” she wanted to say that they had a right to be proud of him, who loved him, but her tongue failed her. Mr. Brooke kept hold of the little hand she had laid in his, and patted it from time to time, but neither spoke any more.

When the carriage was approaching the

lodge at the foot of the new road Mary Martha mentioned her wish to go and inquire for Mrs. Marriott, and her Uncle Richard said that they would both go, and Jack drove on through the village to the Manor. Mr. Brooke did not leave the carriage, but M. M. was admitted into the house.

George's mother was alone. She said that her daughter Dolly had left her for an hour to breathe the air and walk off the dull strain and oppression of waiting for tidings. She was scarcely more downhearted than Mary Martha herself; she too had reckoned up George's chances and found them a counter-balance to his risks.

"He has had some strange pieces of luck in his life, and his father does not believe that he is lost," she said, "Oh, no! We may look for a telegram at any moment. Whenever George sets foot on dry land, or touches only to sail on, if it be a station from which telegrams can be dispatched we may be confident that he will let us know. George is

not one who forgets other people, or fancies they don't care."

It was an evident relief and pleasure to Mrs. Marriott to speak of her son to Miss Brooke, and she told Dolly that the sweet girl either did not fear for George, or could not realize anything but what she hoped.

Dr. Sparrow returned from a professional visit while Mr. Brooke's carriage stood at the gate of the Manor. When he saw that the Squire was in it, he expressed his satisfaction that he had come back home, and advised him not to incur the risks of Hardware smoke and fog again: "You have overdone it now, I see you have," the doctor added, and indeed Mr. Brooke's visage gave cause for remark.

They were discussing the anxiety at the Manor when Mary Martha reappeared, and Sparrow did not detain them: "Your Uncle Richard ought to be under authority, Miss Brooke; he needs to be taken care of," said

he, and then to his patient imperatively : " If you are wise you will get to bed early and rest—*rest*."

" That is what I am least able to do," the old man muttered.

" Oh, but you will rest now we are together again, Uncle Richard. It felt quite unnatural to be alone at the Tower. It is much worse being apart," M. M. said, and then she told him that Mrs. Marriott was like herself—really in pretty good heart.

Her Uncle Richard wondered. She had not one reproach for him, and apparently no thought of one ; while he who did not care for George was quite knocked over by the young fellow's loss, because he had not been kind, and had schemed against them. He had before him a vision of sorrow and desolation where his grand-niece was the mourning figure and George only a ghostly memory. And she could speak of being in pretty good heart, and speak of George's

mother as to a well-wisher and true friend. It was clear that she had no mean thoughts of him—and how had he served, how was he serving her? It was almost equally clear that the Squire was uneasy in his conscience; that he had something on his mind.

Dekker met his master and took charge of him; and then Mary Martha felt the relaxation of her prolonged effort in a weakness and weariness as heavy as his own. Mr. Grimston arrived towards seven o'clock, but Grace did not encourage her to go down to dinner.

"We all know. There's not a soul in the house but grieves," she said; to which her young mistress answered gently and simply: "But you don't give him up, Grace? I don't." Grace answered: "They don't give him up in the village, where there never was such a favourite as Master George. But I have had a trouble of my own, and I misdoubt."—Miss Brooke asked: "What was your trouble, Grace? Tell me."—But

Grace could not talk of it; she said she would tell her mistress some day, perhaps, but not now.

As Mr. Grimston had come Mary Martha was contented to stay upstairs in her sitting-room. The fire was company enough for her, and before bed-time her Uncle Richard came for half an hour. He said that Grimston was staying the night, and he was going to take the doctor's advice himself, and retire early—to rest if he could ; but his habit of not resting was too old to be cured in any way but one.

The next morning's *Standard* had nothing to say of the *Berenice*. There was no news to hand of the still missing passengers and crew ; and first intelligence of some fresh disaster crowded with small print the columns that the *Berenice* had similarly filled for a couple of days. The silence continued over a week, when a paragraph appeared, cabled from an Atlantic station by a Portuguese ship, simply saying, that it had on board five

out of seven persons saved in mid-ocean after terrible sufferings; two had died after their rescue. This paragraph, though it did not mention the *Berenice*, or any other ship, re-aroused over-wearied anxiety to ask who were the five living, and the two committed to the wandering grave of the sea? It was not weather to go idly sauntering and straying in the woods, and Miss Brooke often walked through the village, and saw Mrs. Marriott. They met that day, and studied the painful paragraph, hoping and imagining as before. George's mother for a relief told the story of that letter which George had written to Mary Martha at St. Croix, and which she had not received.

"Mrs. Holland has it—she must give it you," she said, as if it were a treasure that might become a relic.

"George let me have it before he went away—I kept it," M. M. answered. She might had said further that she read it every day—continually.

“His father is coming home to-morrow. He is sick of staying in London by himself, and poor George is not helped by his father’s suffering. The shipowners will let us know whatever news comes.”

People turn back to their customary cares and employments even in waiting for tidings of their nearest and dearest, and though their hearts misgive them that tidings may never be sent. Mary Martha opened her books again, and read and walked, and played soft music in the twilight to her Uncle Richard, and from time to time was aghast at her own apathy—but was it apathy? She said afterwards that she knew George was of this world still; and it was not hard to her to live in the patience of hope. Besides her Uncle Richard needed thoughtful devotion and kindness in these days. His spirits did not rally, and his strength ran down, Dr. Sparrow came every morning, and Mr. Grimston did not go away of nights. The old servants indoors moved about softly, and

old servants from out of doors came to bid the master good-by, named and sent for one by one, by himself. Oke came daily, and was, indeed, much at the Tower. He would be the Squire's chief mourner, the others said. Last of all Mary Martha herself was told that the change could not be far off; that her Uncle Richard was passing away.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. BROOKE'S WILL.

“Man is a watch, wound up at first, but never
Wound up again ; once down, he's down for ever.
The watch once down, all motions then do cease ;
The man's pulse stopt, all passions sleep in peace.”

HERRICK

MR. BROOKE died and was buried. It is very likely that the tears of his grand-niece comforted him most. She was not willing to let him leave her ; but her strong desire to keep him availed no more than such desires ever have availed. The old Squire had no disease but age, which drifts men down to the grave quickly, when the anchor of hope ceases to hold them to life. He never knew that George Marriott was safe and well, and on his way home to England while he lay a-dying. But George was in time for his

funeral, and appeared in the ranks with other neighbours, who put on mourning for a day. James Grimston and he stood side by side at the open grave, and shook hands at the churchyard gate. Mary Martha was there and saw it.

They had learnt for a certainty that George was alive only on the evening preceding Mr. Brooke's death. He had been bitterly anxious to hear of him during the last days when his own life was ebbing. Mary Martha was so good, so dear. Her tears had risen and fallen so softly and silently in his sight. The grieving of her young and tender spirit was like a refreshing dew to his heart. He was sorry now, sorry beyond everything for her. There was inquiry in his looks whenever she came in to him, and disappointment each time she shook her head and said, "Not yet, not yet!" The keen desire to know was there as long as consciousness continued.

Dinner was just over when a messenger

arrived from the Manor, the bearer of a post-office envelope and its precious enclosure. Mary Martha heard afterwards that the messenger was George's brother Frank—George had landed at Plymouth, and was coming, coming! M. M. went swiftly to her Uncle Richard's room. "Hush!" said the nurse; but M. M. came to the bedside, and kissed him, and held up the telegraph paper, and said: "He is safe! George is safe!" but there was no answer in the dull eyes now, and no flutter of words on the lips. "Hush!" said the nurse again; "don't disturb him. He will never speak any more." Even in that dreadful hour Mary Martha longed to satisfy his anxious soul. "Ah, how I wish he knew!" She stayed, she kept her place. Mr. Westley stole in and said the prayers for the dying. Others were there—James Grimston, Oke, Dekker, Dr. Sparrow. But she had heard of a lightening that comes before death, and hoped that he might wake up yet, and be glad for

her even in the very parting of his spirit. But there was no sign.

Elizabeth Sheffield had come to the Tower, and was waiting in her cousin's sitting-room. It was after midnight when Mary Martha returned to her, the telegram still in her hand, and the tears running down her face.

"Poor Uncle Richard is gone, he is dead; and he did not hear when I told him George was safe—I am so, so sorry," she began to say.

Elizabeth comforted her with the kindest words at her command: "Maybe he did hear, M. M."

And now after one little week the funeral was over, the dead put out of sight, and the living building their hopes in his empty place.

James Grimston was left sole executor of the will, which surprised no one. He had taken up his stewardship in Hardenware from the moment the old Trust expired, and though he reported each step of his pro-

ceedings at the Tower, Mr. Brooke listened as a man listens to what has ceased to concern him, or even to interest him. His death would alter nothing there. James would be owner where he had been overseer—that was all.

The ex-trustees had predicted this devise of the Great Mead long before; but Mr. Marriott had changed his views when Miss Brooke appeared upon the scene. George had since said a few words to his father, conveying a doubt of Mr. Brooke's power to alienate old Roger's estate, and give it to a stranger. Mr. Parry held that opinion, and made it known to Grimston at the very time he was instructed to negative it in his client's will. Grimston had nothing to say then but, that if it was an "opinion" which Mr. Brooke did not hold, it need not interfere with the disposition he was minded to make of his property. Mr. Parry foreboded evil from setting it aside—trouble in some shape. Miss Brooke had been led to think of her-

self as heiress to a life's work in the town, and to begin with, she might require an explanation how she could be disinherited of it. And George Marriott—he might have something to say in the matter. George believed in a remote contingent title for himself. Failing a Brooke of Harden to take the fields that Roger's wife had brought him as her dower, there was a reversion to the next-of-kin of her own name and family; and this seemed to preclude the entrance of a stranger. The clauses of the old Trust on which the opinion was grounded they interpreted in a sense quite contrary to that which Mr. Brooke discovered in them. Young Parry who had a professional mind, perceived that much might be said on both sides the case. If the persons concerned had a taste and inclination for law, there was as fine an opportunity for letting out the waters of strife as lawyers could wish; and a chance of the waters spreading until the fields were swallowed up far more effectually than ever they were

by the floods that descended from the Harden Hills at the melting of the winter snows.

Mr. Brooke read the enigmatical clauses through the lens of his sheer determination to do as he pleased.

He made his will as he had all along intended to make it, if his grand-niece did not fall in with his views for James Grimston; and then, warned of possible contention, he took secret precautions for the maintenance of peace. He wrote a letter with his own hand to be given her at the reading of his last testament, when her mind would be solemnized and softened by the recent presence of death, and her generous temper likely to turn away from any suggestion of wrong done to her. The letter was more detailed than the will. That was very brief and explicit. Mary Martha took Harden Tower, and the old lands belonging to it, and James Grimston took the Great Mead. Of the accumulated funds derived from former rents and recent sales in Hardenware, she took one-third, and

James two-thirds. No other name of the testator's kindred was mentioned, but every friend and servant he had was well remembered. In the letter, the ready money which would pass to M. M. as her third from the town property was specified as thirty-seven thousand pounds, or thereabouts, of which thirty thousand were settled in trust for her, and seven thousand, or more or less, left at her own free and instant disposal. Then her Uncle Richard gave his reason for the alienation of the Hardenware estate; he said that she would be happier without it, and it would be a profession for James Grimston who would use it in improving the material condition of the inhabitants, and promoting migration and emigration among the work-people. He reminded her that James had been as a son to him, and bade her acquiesce in the bequest with all her heart; and keep him for her friend and adviser, who was already in the position of her guardian and trustee.

With her previous knowledge Mary

Martha could read between the lines of this letter many things that were not written. She read that her Uncle Richard could not condone her Aunt Lena's offences or forgive her children for bearing the name of Devine, but he had put it in her power to do them kindness on his behalf, according to her own light and judgment. And she could read that Katherine de Marcel had certainly been right, and that he had meant James Grimston and herself to be joint heirs of his affection and all else that he had, the labours and cares of the Great Mead included.

She brought no tears to the reading of this letter, but regarded it simply as a supplementary will, and binding as the other. So far as her own ambition was involved she would gladly give place to James Grimston at Hardenware, but at once, and while thinking of it, there rose to her mind the question, "What will George say?"

"What will George say?" was Mary Martha's most natural reflection on the dis-

inheritance that astonished her, but which she had not had time yet to feel as an injury. "What will George say?" she asked herself, and the thought occupied her mind to the exclusion of many others.

That Miss Brooke and Mr. George Marriott were more than common friends was no secret in the house now, nor to some of their neighbours. But Mary Martha was shut up at the Tower with Elizabeth, in the first days of her mourning, and none of the rumours of the time were brought to her ears. George was the first person she saw from out of doors. He came up the hill to inquire for her within an hour of reaching home; and when Dekker told him the longing and distress of his poor old master to know that he was safe, and how the news only came when he was past hearing it, he would wait until Miss Brooke was told that he was there. She wished him to go in and let her see him; and Elizabeth slipped away to let them have this meeting alone.

The next day after the funeral Mary Martha received George again. George was a weather-beaten waif of the sea yet, very dark and lean, and his left arm in a sling ; but he had not any serious hurt, and would soon make good his loss in pleasant looks. Nothing ailed his spirits. He told the story of the wreck, of his sufferings adrift and final rescue, with Elizabeth Sheffield sitting by ; and the odd ludicrous incidents that glint through all tragedies seemed the best remembered parts of it. If the newspapers had not spoken Mary Martha would not have heard of George's heroism, which was the necessity of the occasion, and never thought of as heroism by himself at all. Presently Elizabeth left them to themselves, and it felt like "only yesterday" since they parted. From Dekker George had learnt how Mr. Brooke's mind had changed towards him through pity and pure sympathy with his grand-niece in her time of distress and suspense, and it needed few words to tell the

rest which chiefly concerned their own unchangeableness.

"I knew, I always knew, that you would come back, George, and here you are! This is why I cannot be conventional and wretched," M. M. cried, extenuating her simple state of feeling with tears in her eyes and a thrill of sorrow in her voice. "Uncle Richard would not wish that I should play at misery. He liked people to be reasonable, and not make a noise of their grief. And yet I think it was a sort of consolation when he saw that I could not help crying for him. He was very good to me—you must not think he was ever anything but good and kind to me. We were excellent friends. I would not do anything to vex him for the world—not for the whole world!"

This and much more she said, but on two matters, though they were uppermost in her mind, she said nothing—perhaps her protest against doing anything to vex her Uncle Richard conveyed an intimation of what they

were. She did not speak of the Great Mead, or of the hopes and plans that underlay Mr. Brooke's negative to George's suit and his bequest to James Grimston. Of Mr. Grimston she said only that she supposed George would hear that he was appointed her guardian. George had heard that, and important particulars besides. His father had told him there could be no doubt Mr. Brooke had meant his grand-niece to marry James Grimston, and as little that James Grimston would have liked it himself. "I daresay he would," George had said drily; and knowing Mary Martha so well as he did, he approved her present tone of reserve.

It had been advised and decided that Miss Brooke should leave home for a few weeks of travel with Elizabeth Sheffield. She announced her wish to return for Christmas. "I should wish to spend Christmas at the Tower," she said, and as nobody had any right to gainsay her wishes, the servants left in charge took their orders accordingly.

The cousins stayed in London, at the old house by the river, for a couple of days. Elizabeth said that if she were Mary Martha, she would keep it up for a place to come to when she wearied of the country ; to which M. M. answered that it would be as George pleased.

From London they went to St. Leonards, to Eastbourne, to Brighton, and on a delightful serene day of December they crossed from Newhaven to Dieppe, and went on to St. Croix. The pretty apartment on the ramparts was empty, and they were received with the welcome of thankfulness. Mary Martha meant this visit to Normandy for a charming surprise to her cousin Katherine, but it is not certain that Kate appreciated it as she was expected to do. At their first meeting she never scrupled to say that they all, *all*, considered Uncle Richard had made a bad will—a very bad, unjust, cruel, wicked will! M. M. answered calmly: “Then I will not talk to you about it, though I came on purpose—for I do *not*.”

But this was not what Katherine wanted—she would talk of nothing but the will, and the monstrous, *monstrous* bequest to Mr. Grimston; “Mamma says Uncle Richard could not do it—he could not do it by *law* if you chose to resist it;” to which M. M. answered always quietly: “But I shall not resist it.”

Katherine’s indignation was scarcely at all abated even when she was made to understand that though she had no legacy left in the bad will she was yet to be enriched with a sum of money rather larger than her repeatedly expressed desires. It was the *principle* she contended for, she said, and the distribution entrusted to Mary Martha was like a personal gift from her, and had not the consequence and value of a bequest from the head of the family.

However, there was gratitude and pleasure in it for other less expectant persons, call it by what name she would; and Mary Martha renewed her friendships at Château-Marcel

with entire and perfect satisfaction. She invited old Madame and Jeanne to the Tower for the next summer, and said to Katherine that she and her husband must never pass by her gates when they came to England for the annual visits due to Mrs. Ockleston at Saxby.

Mary Martha's wanderings with Elizabeth verged to an end in a night's rest at Hampstead, where Mrs. Sheffield had taken a new red-brick house in an old garden, as a central house for all her daughters to come to. She would not live with any one of them, preferring to be free to have them by turns in a home of her own. She was giving Mary Martha the loan of Elizabeth for some time longer—longer than was convenient—but M. M. was warned that before June she must find another companion. Her Aunt Lena and Aunt Sheffield both said that as Mr. George Marriott was such an *old* friend, and their minds were made up, she had better put off her mourning and marry him.

Then she would be provided with a companion for ever and a day.

"We have never had a quarrel, never a difference, even," M. M. said pensively, listening to the repetition of this advice by her Aunt Martha at Hampstead, which her Aunt Lena had previously given in a letter from Saxby Green.

"There is time enough *yet*—but let us hope you never may," Elizabeth answered, with inward surprise ; and her mother echoed : "*No*, indeed !—let us hope you never may !" And they asked each other after why M. M. should think of quarrelling with George—at such a moment too. They knew nothing of Mr. Brooke's will but what she had told them ; and of other contingent matters they knew nothing at all.

CHAPTER XIII.

BITTER AND SWEET.

“Love’s of itself too sweet ; the best of all
Is, when love’s honey has a dash of gall.”

HERRICK.

MR. BROOKE’S will was the concern of a very small circle of persons, but a great many gave themselves to the discussion of it. There was a general disappointment in Hardenware at the disinheritor of the young lady who had been shown there as the lady of the future, and when it oozed out that she had an old attachment to Mr. George Marriott, and had forfeited the Great Mead for her constancy to him, a good deal of sentimental disapproval of Mr. Brooke, and of sympathy with the lovers was expressed, especially amongst young people.

Meanwhile Mr. Grimston and young Parry

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proceeded to transact their business as executor and executor's clerk, and the affairs of the Hardenware estate in transition were pressed on. Nothing was more sure than this, that James Grimston would keep what he had got, and make no quixotic concessions to the other side, unless they could convince him that he *must*. He found himself a much greater man with the town now than during the period of his inspectorship, and did not give himself any paltry reasons in explanation of it. He liked power and influence to use them well, and power and influence belong to money.

At Stockleigh Manor there was a strong feeling. George had been taken quite aback by Mr. Brooke's will, and mused of it in Mary Martha's absence until he grew angry. If M. M. had thrown him over, she would have had all the property; she had been true to him, and the better half of it was given to his would-be rival. The Great Mead had been Marriott land, and that it should come

back to a Marriott by the way of marriage had been an idea pleasing to his imagination, and cherished as an essential part of the alliance between their families. For George had his ambitions, lively as his tender affections were. At some moments he felt even bitterly angry, and his father's conversation was not soothing, not in the least pacifying. He talked of undue influence; said that the will could only have been executed since the old Trust expired; and before that time it had been noticed that Mr. Brooke was failing, and more that ever dependent on Grimston. The will ought to be disputed, Mr. Marriott said, and the fumes of his ancient quarrel with his neighbour rose again to confuse his wits. Bingham and Fynes were appealed to, but they were not for interference with the will. Brooke was in a clear, disposing frame of mind up to the day of his death, and they did not believe it possible to upset the will. It had been common talk for years that Grimston would have the Great

Mead; and Grimston was a good fellow whose luck ought not to be envied. Perhaps it was felt that George Marriott was fortunate enough in securing the young lady, and the Tower property with her. The majority of people thought so, and said that the will was a good will and need harm none of them unless they fell to law about it.

There was a frequent exchange of letters between George and Mary Martha while she was away, but no mention of affairs unless in one allusion, when George said: "I am not given much to do for you; Harden Tower is manageable by yourself. I expected to have the engineering of the Great Mead," which caused Mary Martha to feel very hot when she read it. She did not say anything in reply to his remarks, and when his father inquired whether she confessed to disappointment about her disinheritance George said his impression was, that she would not care if he did not.

"But you *do* care, George," Mr. Marriott

answered, in a tone to keep him up to caring if he were disposing himself to give way.

George cared much, and he cared persistently. Mary Martha was very dear and sweet when she came home, but she was still reserved, and consciously afraid of this subject. George knew that he would have to speak, and she became aware that her reserve would have to be broken. It was broken rather impulsively at last. One morning she had been summoned to a tedious interview with her guardian and the lawyer, and told George so.

"What does Grimston say of his windfall which makes him a man of fortune again?" George asked a little keenly.

"He says nothing. His windfall is chiefly hard work—but he is used to that," Mary Martha answered with a change of countenance.

"Do you call eighty thousand pounds of hard cash in consols hard work? My father

and I agree that the will ought not to stand. You have not been fairly used—not half fairly used!” George’s voice betrayed the heat that he felt. Mary Martha’s colour rose and her heart throbbed.

“I have no sense of ill-usage, dear. Uncle Richard made a son of Mr. Grimston in his lifetime, and I think he did no more than right to give him a son’s place in his will.”

“You think he did right?”

“Yes, George.”

It has been said elsewhere that George was despotic, and had a strain of the Marriott temper, and he answered in the tone and manner of it: “But I do not—I think he did very unjustly. I believe that the will would break down in a court of law.”

“I shall not carry it into a court of law,” M. M. said in a quiet voice that had a strange thrill in it.

George was silent for an instant, then he rejoined: “You will be ruled by me. You

will be guided by me"—a bold word, perhaps a rash word.

"No, George—not if being ruled by you means vexing Uncle Richard's ghost, and spoiling my own life and yours too—*yours too*—with litigation!" M. M. was warming also. She was not all softness, docility, submission.

George was foolishly provoked and provoking; and retorted with a teasing, loving, vexing air of triumph: "But you will not be able to help yourself, perhaps!"

"I will *save* myself then, George! We will have no marrying until the will is all settled and done with—past upsetting!"

"You don't mean it?"

"I do mean it! I was never in better earnest. You have hurt and disappointed me. I had no idea you were so greedy!"

George had earned what he was receiving. He had not thought to make of the Great Mead a stone of stumbling and rock of offence, but who knows his friend or his

sweetheart—or even himself utterly? He felt almost jealous of James Grimston because Mary Martha fought his battle so valiantly. There was no relenting in her face. She looked straight and fearless at her lover, the rosy bow of her mouth prepared to wing more word-barbed arrows if he did not hasten to deprecate the volley of her wrath. Instead, he stood up to her manfully insisting that he had reason in what he said, and must make her hear it.

“Reason or unreason, George, you shall not carry me into Chancery—don’t imagine it! I wish we were only going to embark in that ‘pony-shay,’ which was once the top of my ambition! Possessions don’t make people happier or better—nor *kinder*, George!”

Their contention went no further that day, naturally it went no further, for they loved each other, more than they loved “possessions,” and on the next, which was Christmas Eve, they made a party to go down to Hardenware, and be present at the church

service and distribution of the Dole to the Poor above the grave of Roger Brooke and his wife Bess Marriott.

It had been the duty of the trustees to appear on the occasion for so many Christmas Eves, that the memory of man ran not to the contrary, and the presence of Mr. Grimston in their room, taking their part in the ceremony, while Miss Brooke sat in the vicarage pew, caused ancient members of the congregation, who were out of the way of hearing about wills, to ask what it meant. They had gone to church expecting to see the young lady give the bread, the same young lady who had laid the foundation-stone of the new buildings in the Four Acres, and they wanted to know why she was not in her place.

Mary Martha felt her exclusion as she had not supposed it possible she could feel it. The spectacle touched and interested her, but her heart burned when she saw the poor aged men and women, dressed in their warm new duffle coats and cloaks, file past the

donors' tombstone, and take their loaf and money from James Grimston's hands.

As they were leaving the church, George said to her that he had not liked to see her office so usurped. The office would have pleased her beyond anything, but she only begged him not to mind, though at the same moment she was thinking Mr. Grimston might have invited her to witness the ceremony, if he did not invite her to assume the part of the loaf giver, which he well knew she had been led to expect would be her own part. But Mr. Grimston was more and more restricting himself to the duties of his executorship and trusteeship, and had not once received his ward since her Uncle Richard's death, or gone to her for the transaction of necessary business unattended by young Parry, who acted as his clerk in all the affairs of the late Mr. Brooke.

The disinherittance of the young lady was not passing so entirely without disturbance to Mr. Grimston as it had promised in the first

instance to do. There are always people who keep traditions in mind, and some of these presently began to talk of the *town* itself being heir to old Roger, if there were no Brooke of Harden, and no Marriott to the fore at the expiration of his Trust. The notion of there being any want of Marriotts raised a laugh, for they were legion, and their tribe would undoubtedly have made a scramble for the land and money, had not the young lady, the sole Brooke remaining, imposed on their ardour all the check that was needful. But these persons believed themselves justified when they remarked that Miss Brooke was not exempt from death, and suppose she died unmarried—what then? Was it wise or politic to let Grimston put his foot down on the Great Mead? they asked. Not if it could be prevented, but who could prevent it, unless Miss Brooke moved in the matter? was the rejoinder. She was supposed not to have the wish to move in it; and Mr. Grimston as her guardian, was perhaps in a

position to hold her hands, even if she had. Talking altered nothing, and James Grimston left the talkers unanswered.

At the Tower the deep winter did not seem to linger with Elizabeth's company, and frequent visits from the neighbours, which also Mary Martha returned. There was no great snow, and no sleighing, but open weather and plenty of hunting for George; and altogether these months to the verge of spring went happily and well. But when one of a pair thinks the other is too patiently suffering a wrong, which must ultimately involve both, the circumstances are dangerous for peace. George had kept away from the vexed question for a long while, when Mary Martha, in reply to an inquiry why she went so seldom to Hardenware now, said that she had no need to go—written orders to the shops did as well—and no pleasure in going since the old house in the Four Acres had passed to Mr. Grimston, and she could not drop in there any more for an hour's rest, when she

made a long day in the town. George said, of course, she could not drop in there, but why could she not drop in at the vicarage?—they were only too glad to see her.

“I do drop in every time I drive to Hardenware, but I don’t like to make an inn of a busy house,” she replied.

George walked about to keep down his temper, but he did not refrain from a strong word or two. “I declare,” cried he, “the longer it lasts the more of a shame I feel it!”

Elizabeth Sheffield stole away—if lovers must disagree it is best they should have no witnesses.

Mary Martha knew what George meant, and left his exclamation unnoticed. He attempted remonstrance again. Once already he had requested her to consult Mr. Parry, and now he repeated the request. She looked at him rather pathetically, and said: “You don’t know, dear, how it tires me, all this! I should die of disputing if we kept

on. Don't you think we might cry a truce till I am of age?"

"What do you mean?" George asked, standing before her.

M. M. coloured warmly, and did not exactly know how to tell him what she meant. Everybody who had a right to advise her (except her guardian who never spoke) advised putting off her mourning, and marrying in June.—She meant putting off marrying till she was of age. In the difficulty of answering George, she answered him rather harshly: "You beg me to consult Mr. Parry. Go and consult lawyers yourself, and hear what you could do if you had the power. If they counsel fighting—I counsel you to go back to Spain."

"*Marry Martha?*" George stood aghast, and spoke with the voice of a suppliant.

She had the tears in her eyes but none the less would she banish him before she would put it in his power to coerce her into a quarrel with James Grimston over her Uncle

Richard's will. George took a turn into the North for a week. Mary Martha was glad when he came back, but she had not changed her mind. Nor had he. George would never hang nor drown himself for love. Nor would he give an undertaking to leave James Grimston for ever in peace in the Great Mead as a condition of their early marriage. He would wait—he would go back to Spain, if such were her goodwill and pleasure, but he would keep his liberty of action. He told her so himself, looking down upon her as confidently and kindly as if only a game of tennis were in question, or where they should drive in a pony-shay; and it will be easily believed that she liked him none the less for holding his own, and declining to make an unworthy capitulation when he knew he was right. For he assured her that he knew he was right. "Then we are *both* right, George, and there's an end to it," she retorted with lively emphasis.

At this point George made a polite request

to be allowed to see that letter of her Uncle Richard's which was binding on her conscience. Now Mary Martha had received a new light on that letter since she had listened to the exceptions taken against the will; and she would have preferred to keep it close, for an odd little reason she had admitted to herself but would never admit to any one else. She was sure she did right in obeying it, but she believed that her Uncle Richard was not so sure he was doing right when he disinherited her of the Great Mead, and laid the weight of a dying command upon her to acquiesce in it with all her heart. This light which had dawned on her by degrees would break on George in a moment. However, she must not refuse him—the wonder was, perhaps, that he had not asked for it before, or that she had not offered it. Behind her reserves and reticences and obstinacies there was a sense of gratitude, admiration and pity for James Grimston which bound her as with a triple cord of kindness to do nothing to

hurt him further. She would not speak of him to George, who was too angry with his luckless rival's better fortune in Hardenware to do him any sort of justice with her.

Mr. Brooke's letter was in that drawer of the writing-table where James Grimston's glove lay, but the drawer was locked now, having other treasures of letters in it—his own as George saw, being pleased to overlook M. M. while she sought the other. Everything was in precisest order, and she had handled the glove so often that she hardly observed it. But George did. "*Mine?*" said he, and took it up only to discover that it was *not* his. M. M. had grown rather ashamed of her thoughtlessness in taking charge of this glove, and would have thrown it away only—she did not like. George had laid it down again but was still regarding it when she gave him her Uncle Richard's letter. "*There!*" said she, aware of the glove but declining to notice it.

George read the letter carefully, and twice ; then he looked up at the sky through the window, perhaps considering it in connexion with the glove. Mary Martha had sat down in her own place before the table, and George stood out in the room at some distance. As his reverie lasted rather long she suggested speech by saying softly : " Well, George ? "

" But it is *not* well," George answered, and came a little nearer. M. M. looked up and begged to know what was amiss next. " That is what I am trying to find out. Your Uncle Richard, when he made his will, knew perfectly that he was doing wrong, and that half the world would say so. "

Mary Martha groaned in spirit and in sense : " Oh, George, how tiresome you are ! " she cried out in sincere remonstrance.

" Am I ? Then I'll go back to Spain ! Whose is that glove ? "

" Mr. Grimston's. "

" Why do you keep it ? "

"Because he left it behind in the study once, and I took charge of it, and—and—I can't tell you, George."

"You forgot it until you did not like to give it to him, and then you did not like to cast a poor fellow's glove away?—Was that it?"

"Yes, George. If you had left a new glove at Thornhill one of us would have kept it for you—it would not have been given to the servants."

"Enough of the glove. I am satisfied about the glove—but *Mary Martha?*"—in his wooing, beautiful voice that always drew her.

"Yes, George?"

"I believe you do love me a little?"

"What would it take to convince you that I do love you much?"

"One or two concessions."

"It will be nothing but concessions by-and-by, George. Don't be too hard. Don't ask what I cannot, *cannot* do." She came

up to him pleading with voice, face, hands, every look and gesture.

“Come to Spain with me!”

“All in that pony-shay! And let the Great Mead go swimming down the river?”

“Oh, Mary Martha, how tiresome *you* are!—that’s no concession,” George said, and now he groaned, but not as heavily as she had done.

“There’s no hurry, dear—let us leave it to time,” she urged with a lovely tenderness that put time at a discount.

“I hate time, unless it be time present. Give me to-day!”

M. M. gazed about for an answer. It was a breezy bright morning of April. “Let us go out and bury the glove,” said she, inspired by the idea with new cheerfulness; for to go out and be busy and active in the open air always restored George’s good humour. An indoors, unoccupied, idle, uninteresting life would bore him to death.

On the terrace they met Elizabeth and

invited her to come down with them to the new flower garden which George was laying out on a plan adapted to the exigencies of Nature. He had said to Mary Martha: "Which shall it be—a piece of ground levelled at much expense, then neatly turfed and trimmed with ribbon borders, or a piece of the wild landscape, where flowers may grow at home, and roses flourish like the wild rose in the hedges?" Mary Martha had chosen the wild landscape design, and already in the deep leaf mould she had clumps of all the spring lilies coming out, and along a deep groove where the soil was moist and rich would be soon a hedge of roses that open kindly, yellow briars and others, free-bloomers, fountains of sweetness. Here and there natural rocks cropped up from the green with ferns at their feet, and on the stony ground were rooted in wallflowers stocks, pinks, snapdragons, perfume and colour for early summer, and a succession of mignonette and verbenas to follow. They

smelt the violets as they walked, and saw all the fair promise of beauty to come. It was a great space to be called a flower-garden, and its boundaries you did not see; they merged into the wild wood that sheltered it from rude winds, and made it a perfect nesting place for the birds. It was full of sunshine and their warbling now, and picturesque beyond all that Mary Martha had imagined. Elizabeth did not stay with the lovers long, and then they buried the glove.

This was the place where Mary Martha liked to dream that they two might grow old together. It was not a quarrel between them yet, and would not become a quarrel while they were left to themselves. Elizabeth said frankly that she would have nothing to do with advising them; but Mrs. Marriott on the plea that Miss Brooke had no mother or lady of experience to give her good counsel, came to the Tower, and talked to her on George's behalf and in George's and

his father's sense. Mary Martha did not ask if George had sent her, but she assumed that his mother would not have undertaken this mission without his knowledge; she was annoyed; she listened with invincible kindness, but without giving way, and as much as possible without saying anything.

She had received that morning two invitations, the first to Crosby, the other to Castle-island, and she left home the next day but one, without seeing George again. A letter dated Crosby, where she found Helen Carter, let him know where she was gone, and that her absence might be from a week to a fortnight. He was her "dearest George," and she was his "Mary Martha, ever loving and true," but between these sweet words there was a little word of a bitter taste, praying him to let them have their differences between themselves alone—always, *always*. George did not tell his mother what had resulted from her interference, but she

suspected from his face, that he was vexed, and became sure of it when he spoke of running up to London to see Sir John Hardy. From London Mary Martha had his answer to her letter, the sum of which was that if their marriage must be deferred—he might as well go to Spain. Waiting about in suspense at Stockleigh, with not enough to do, would destroy him!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST.

— “All’s well that ends well.”

BUT George was not called upon to go to Spain.

Down at the dower-house, there was severe searching of hearts. James Grimston was not recovering from his latest tragedy so well as he might have done, and his eagle faced old grandmother wished for his sake that the Brooke-Marriott marriage were well over. James saw constantly that basket of roses, and heard the soft tremulous voice that had dashed down his hopes of a brighter life ; he did his best and utmost to be interested in his new fortunes, and got through a power of hard work, making his property serve him truly for a profession, as Mr. Brooke intended

it should do, and it was a dreadful surprise and pain to him when he learnt that there were discussions between the lovers, because of the Great Mead having fallen to him. "Have they not enough?" he said bitterly. "If they are disagreeing it can be only Marriott's fault. It is not hers, I am very sure."

But when he heard that George was gone to London, with an idea of going to Spain again, he cast about in his own mind what to do; and, after half a day's debate with himself, decided to take counsel's opinion on the whole matter. He sent the trust-deed and a copy of the will to a personal friend, who was also one of the highest legal authorities in the kingdom. The letter he received in answer sustained his own judgment in every particular, which was satisfying, but no surprise to him. Indeed, it had never seemed to him that there could be any real difficulty in the case, since there was a Brooke at Harden Tower to take the Great Mead

when the Trust expired. The famous counsel said, it was perfectly clear that Roger Brooke had imposed neither limits nor conditions in the use of the property upon the individual who fell heir to it, and Mr. Brooke's will could not be impugned on that ground. Many questions might have been raised had there been none of the name remaining, or resident at the Tower, into which, for the present purpose it was needless to enter, since the contingency had not occurred. Mr. Grimston was secure in his possessions, and no effort to shake his title was likely to succeed.

James carried this letter first to his grandmother: "Shall I send it to Miss Brooke?" he asked, seeking further advice.

Mrs. Grimston thought not: "From what we hear, Miss Brooke is of your side," she said; and after a minute's consideration added, with an encouraging firmness of tone: "You must be more of a man, James, and take up your duty as her guardian without

any sentimental feelings. I imagine that she is expecting it of you. See Mr. George Marriott. Invite him to come and talk over the business with you."

"No doubt, that would be the briefest and best way. I should be sorry, indeed, if a long quarrel and separation came of it," James said.

"Of course you would, especially if you had it to remember that you might have averted a quarrel. Ask him to come here, and talk it over like reasonable men who ought to be friends."

In this, as in so many things besides, it is the first step that costs most. James Grimston had to sacrifice some natural indignation, and more than sentimental feelings, in summoning his rival to a consultation on Miss Brooke's affairs; but he got the better of them in the course of the interview. George Marriott obeyed his summons with alacrity. He had returned from London and his visit to Sir John Hardy only two days

before, having received excellent advice from his chief, which he had determined to act upon. Sir John had urged him by no means to abandon his profession, or to be indifferent to sweet money of his own earning. The great engineer had a very poor opinion of the life of a country gentleman of small estate (and that his wife's), and there George was with him. The man of experience in the world had gone on to say to his favourite pupil, that it was a pity to worsen his disappointment with regard to the Hardenware property by quarrelling with Mr. Grimston. It would be wiser to come to terms with him, and get the business of the estate, which was what he needed. "Occupation, George, that's the thing; nothing lasts but *work*. We are pleased while we are about it, and pleased and proud when it is done; and ours lives after us, which is a fact not to be slighted." Also it was intimated to George that his chief would recommend him to the Hardenware local authorities, who always consulted him-

self. There was a new bridge to build, besides embanking the river. Ah! there was enough to do to keep him busy and happy at home without going to Spain, which was not a pleasant country, either, at mid-summer. Let him go home.

George went home, and the first ride he took was to the dower-house, on one of April's most capricious mornings. It was shining when he set out, and when he arrived the sky and the chimney-smoke of the town had met and mingled in clouds overhead. It was a dark room into which he was ushered, and but for the fire on the hearth, it would have seemed sadly dreary. George's eyes, accustomed to the cheerful, bright pleasantness of the Manor, took it in with some wonder. Mrs. Grimston was there as well as James, and met him kindly, while James gave him a strong grasp of the hand. George recollected one or two words that he wished he had not said.

The old lady left them, and James straight-way proceeded to business.

“I have sent for you that I may set right one or two erroneous impressions that I understand you to have received about the old Trust and Mr. Brooke’s will. I think, if you will clear your mind of previous notions, and will read them through composedly here, you will find your judgment in complete accord with counsel’s opinion, which I have taken, and I will give you to read afterwards.

George felt rather like being schooled, but was not affronted. James Grimston appeared quite old, dark and gaunt this morning, sad as the sunless house, and his expression was of a suffering that bespoke pity. He pointed to a table in front of the window, where lay the deed and the copy of the will. George stepped that way, and sat down, unfolded the yellow parchment, and applied himself to its perusal, composedly, as he had been requested. James drew near and laid the lawyer’s letter at his hand as he reached the signature of the deed. When George had

read that, he had no longer any doubt that Mr. Brooke might have bequeathed the Great Mead to the Great Mogul if he had so wished, and to read the copy of the will was therefore unnecessary. But Grimston said he had better make a full end while he was about it, and George obeyed.

"Now are you satisfied?" he was asked next.

"I am satisfied that Mr. Brooke did not exceed his powers in giving you the Great Mead; but I am not satisfied that he did fairly in giving it to you," was George's prompt answer. "He should not have made as if his grand-niece was to have it, if that was ever in his mind."

"Perhaps that is not the question. Mr. Brooke did what he liked with his own; and what I want to prove to you is that I cannot be dispossessed of what he gave me."

"You have proved it sufficiently."

"I should be happier in using it if you could take the thing by the right handle. Miss Brooke has no hard thoughts of me.

She knows that for thirty years I was like a son to her grand-uncle. It is not wealth, but hard work that I have inherited, anxious and endless work. If you feel it unfair that I should have it all and you none, I am ready to share it with you. You expected to have the engineering of the Great Mead for Miss Brooke? You shall have it, and welcome! I am ready to strike that bargain at once."

As James Grimston spoke he stretched out his hand. George was not ungenerous, and he was touched. He was convinced besides that what was done would not be undone. He accepted James's hand, and with thanks for his offer of work, and they did not turn back to the former questions. James began to speak of things future, as if time pressed.

"I have made my own will already, for life is unsure. The town will inherit the Great Mead and its cares after me. One thing only I have reserved; and that is the land charged with the Dole to the Poor on

Christmas Eve, which I have made over to Miss Brooke by deed of gift. Here is the bit of writing ; you may carry it to her."

James drew a long blue envelope, addressed to his ward, from a rack on the table. George demurred to taking it at first, and then consented. He was not quite so much his own master as usual. Mrs. Grimston came into the hall as the two men were about to part.

"The sun is breaking out again, I hope," said she with kindly significance.

"Yes, I shall find it shining in the country," George answered with an answering look.

It was shining very brightly in the country, and brightest in the woods about the gate at the hill-top, to which spot Mary Martha had beguiled Ellen Carter and Mary Bingham in search of early primroses. George saw her before she was aware of him ; but at the sound of his horse's feet she mounted on a green hillock to look out who was passing.

"It is George," cried she, and made for the hedge.

“ I have an errand to you, Mary Martha,” George answered from the other side, regarding her with a countenance as enigmatical as he could assume.

“ To say good-by before you go back to Spain ? ” she inquired with a sudden fall of spirits.

But the next moment her heart revived ; for George answered : “ No, not to say good-by, but only good-day. I have a gift to you from your guardian. He sent for me and we have made a treaty. It is to be peace, M. M., it is to be *peace* ! I wish I could reach you to set my seal upon it.”

“ George, I’ll come to the gate ! ”

THE END.